

Guide to using empty premises in Westminster for arts projects

1. Finding a space

- Occasionally, space which is suitable for art projects does become available. Contact Brian Nicholas, Property Manager, Knight Frank LLP at 0207 861 5006 or Brian.Nicholas@knightfrank.com
- Depending on the premises, a **service charge** may be due
- Business rates will apply, and you may need a Licence, see sections 2 and 3

If you have found a location which you would like to use

1. Check if the premises are owned by the council: contact the Property Manager (see above)
2. If the property is privately owned, you will have to check the Land Registry online at www.landregistry.gov.uk
Select the *Find a Property* tab and enter the address. The fee is £4 per property. If you need assistance, call Customer Help on 0844 892 1111, select option 3

If you do not have a particular location in mind, here are some agencies and websites with useful information on empty properties:

- **group+work** is an artist-led initiative, commissioned by Emerge with the support of Westminster City Council, to research setting up artist-run spaces in Westminster. Their free guide LIVE, LEARN, WORK, CREATE is available as a booklet or podcast at: www.group-work.org/
- **Creative Space Agency** links the owners of vacant properties with creative professionals looking for potential spaces in London in which to work, exhibit, perform or rehearse. They offer an up-to-date list of available spaces in London, handy fact sheets and training sessions to help you make the most of the service www.creativespaceagency.co.uk
- **Wasted Spaces** was created to help stem the decaying effect of empty and disused buildings on local areas, while also providing artists with free exhibition space and a chance to reach a wider audience. By recycling disused buildings, Wasted Spaces animates local areas, brings local artists together with new communities and encourages artistic innovation: <http://wastedspaces.org>
- **Location Works** claim to have one of the largest libraries of locations for filming in the UK, and provides agency services especially for artists who wish to film in these locations. The website often receives enquiries from artists looking for disused sites for creative use. Although they work mainly with film makers, they are keen to expand their services to performing and visual artists. The locations are well-categorized and include some which you may find useful: Derelict (domestic), Derelict (industrial), Converted barns, Community Halls, Empty Houses, or Artists' studios, etc. It only specifies the name or region of each venue, but they do have clear, excellent documentation of the spaces, which makes it a practical tool for research www.locationworks.com
- **Meanwhile Space**
Website about the developing policy and practice of community uses of empty shops in town centres, with useful documents and guides www.meanwhile.org.uk/

2. Business rates

- Business rates apply to the lease of all council properties
- **Charity and Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC) Relief**
if your arts organisation is a *Registered Charity*, it may receive the 80% relief due where a property is used for the charitable purposes of it, or any other charity
- To apply for mandatory charity relief [download an application form](#)
The council has discretion to give further relief on the remaining bill: full details are available from the [business rates office](#)
- **Non-Profit Making Organisation Relief**
The council also has discretion to give relief to Non-Profit Making Organisations for more information contact: 020 8315 2050 WestminsterNDR@capita.co.uk

3. Obtaining a licence or the appropriate planning permission

- **Licences**
Straightforward art exhibitions are not classed as regulated entertainment, so do not need a licence. If you are neither trading nor selling food or alcohol, nor affecting the highway/pavement, you should speak to the landlord and reach an agreement. Out of courtesy, you could notify the local police station but this is not a requirement, unless you have VIPs attending.

If your event is regulated entertainment, an interactive installation, or some kind of performance, you must check that the landlord either holds a premises licence, or is prepared to apply for a *TEN (Temporary Event Notice)*. For more details, see www.westminster.gov.uk/services/business/businessandstreettradinglicences
- **Planning permission**
It is easiest for an art exhibition, where the work is being sold, to be held in an empty shop, pub, café, or bank, because this will not require a “*change of use*” application – see the *List of Use Classes* below

For listed buildings or exhibitions that require change of planning use, you will have to apply for planning permission, which takes 6-8 weeks.

In most cases, the landlord can only agree to let artists use the space at very short notice, so there is often not enough time to process an application.
- **Advice from the planning team**
The key to achieving a successful result is making sure that the proposed activity matches the existing ‘use class’ of the premises, thus removing the requirement for planning permission, for example:
 - i. for a selling gallery: putting it in a shop, pub, café, or bank, will not require a *change of use* application
 - ii. for an installation that charges admission, or is by invitation only: using 'D1' premises (see next page) would not require an application
 - iii. an installation/gallery which is free to enter, but not selling anything, is a bit of a grey area: it would be easier to hold such events in D1 premises

- **Use Classes**
 - A1 Shops:** shop, domestic hire shop, drycleaners, hairdresser, post office, pet shops, sandwich bar, showroom, travel & ticket agency, undertaker
 - A2 Financial and professional services:** bank, building society, betting office, estate and employment agencies, professional and financial services
 - A3 Restaurants and cafés:** for the sale of food and drink for consumption on the premises - restaurants, snack bars and cafes
 - A4 Drinking establishment:** public house, wine bar or other drinking establishment (but not night clubs)
 - A5 Hot food takeaways:** for the sale of hot food for consumption off the premises
 - D1 Non-residential institutions:** crèche, day nursery, day centre, health centre, clinic, school, hall, art gallery, museum, library, place of worship, church hall, law court, non-residential education and training centres
- **For more information** www.westminster.gov.uk/services/environment/planning/apply

4. Funding

- **Arts Council England**
“Arts in Empty Spaces” has closed, but organisations are welcome to apply for funding via [Grants for the Arts](#)

5. Case Study

- **Street Pianos Project, 23rd June - 14th July 2009**
 Run by *Sing London*, 30 pianos were delivered to public places across London. Westminster Council worked with the artists to place 7 pianos in street markets, squares and empty shops for everyone to use and enjoy

6. Background reading

- **Meanwhile Space**
“Meanwhile Intermediary Handbook” and *“Benefits to Stakeholders”*
www.meanwhile.org.uk/
- The **National Federation of Artists’ Studio Providers** has produced guidance notes on using temporary spaces as artists’ studios
www.nfasp.org.uk/media/doc/Temporary_Space_NFASP_guidance_note.pdf
- **Investing in Creative Industries - guide for local authorities** produced by the Work Foundation, supported by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Local Government Association (LGA) to provide some answers to a range questions that local authorities ask when making decisions to invest in creative industries www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=11228828