

Creative District, Corridor or Hub ?

A few comments...

This document outlines a few of the arguments for a vibrant and thriving grass roots contemporary artists' space (or spaces!) in Burnley town centre.

It's intended as a starting point in a much bigger local conversation, about what role art plays in revitalising the high street, as such is a provocation as much as a road map.

Jai Redman

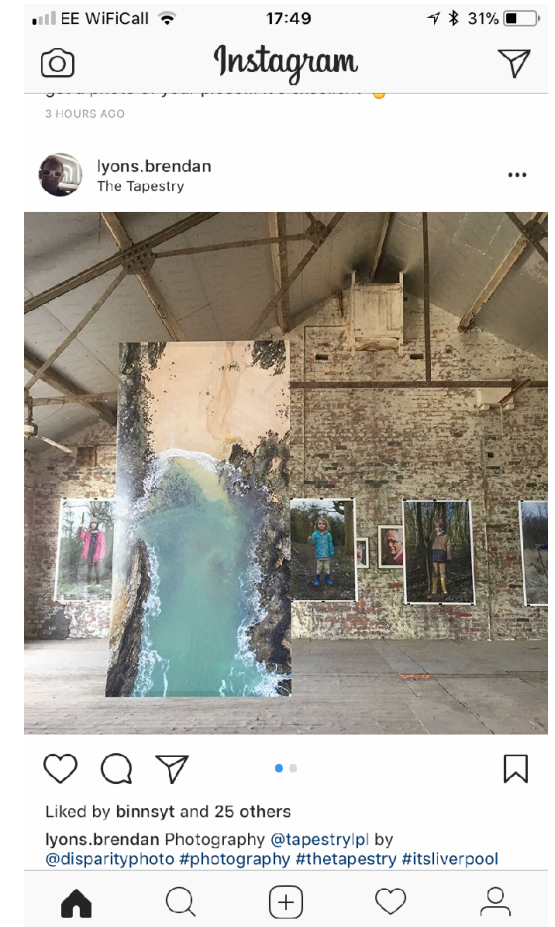
Director, Creative Spaces Burnley, 2019

- Let's make it artist led, not PR driven, from the start. Creatives will see through the 'fake it til we make it' strategy, are nervous about Council-led initiatives. Give the art community permission to curate the 'district'.
- We need to identify existing allies. Are there landlords can we work with? It's not necessary to create an 'us and them'. Existing businesses can have artist-created facades installed, shutter decoration, lamp post interventions, fast food can be street food.
- Placemaking is possible anywhere. There is an important blue plaque here on Lower St James's Street! Plus, names can be suggested by and with local uniqueness (Brown Street meets Cow Lane - and writes its own story). An artist led research project could work with local history experts, existing tenants and local community to discover and develop a new culture-led placemaking rationale, that could in turn create a sense of 'arrival' in Burnley. This does not need to be costly, or require traditional, permanent 'landmark' installations — such follies can actually turn-off genuine practitioners.
- An artist led space in the Lower St James's Street area could be an attractive alternative destination with the potential to attract new visitors to the town, seeking independent creative traders, crafts, events, public performance. Value of spaces would provide match funding for established artists to approach funding bodies to create regular content (arts activities, education, exhibitions, workshops)

without the implicit need for the local council to lead or match bids. A percentage of rents from managed artists' studios could create a significant new programme.

- Burnley is more than a *place*, it is an *idea*. Like its big city cousin Manchester in the 1990s, it should be bold in harnessing the outside appeal of the imagination of its residents, rather than just trading on the nostalgia of its industrial past. Framing the history of Burnley as something that's yet to happen, would inject new energy. Manchester framed its musical heritage as evidence of its tenacity and bravado, these values appeal to investors and entrepreneurs and visionaries. It creates a can-do attitude. Burnley is waking up to this possibility too. Currently, however, the artistic heritage is largely invisible.
- International links require residency and exchange opportunities, but could make it possible for artists from other countries to work here. Work/live accommodation opportunities with attached studio space would be very attractive if 'sold' in the context of the region's natural and industrial heritage.
- The provision of secure tenure in affordable, well-managed space for artistic production would, clearly, relieve a good deal of financial and operational pressure in order that artists and makers have the resources need to sustain, in the long-term, their practice in Burnley. This would be a significant draw over nearby cities, where such spaces are under threat, 'meanwhile', over subscribed, or poor quality.

- For the creation of sustainable partnerships, a deeper understanding of what contemporary artist / makers can offer the town would be desirable. This could be kick-started by the existing Burnley Creative Alliance group presenting a showcase in the town, attended by relevant partners (council, businesses, landlords, as well as the general public.





Large, mixed, scalable, connected - pub, warehouse, lots of outdoor space, next to station museum. Very close to train station.



Large, mixed, scalable, connected - pub, warehouse, garage. Very close to train station.



Large, mixed, scalable, connected - warehouse, Easily divided. Very close to train station.



Large, mixed, scalable, connected, easily divided. Very close to train station.

Some artist / maker space requirements:

- Security of tenure is important to the sustainability of artist and creative makers. Long-term, renewable lease arrangements with easy in/out would be required.
- Sole occupancy (artists make noise and work unusual hours)
- For sale (freehold) or long peppercorn lease only
- Secure - the area needs to be seen as safe at night, to encourage ancillary night time economy.
- 24 hour access
- Ideally include options for sharing spaces and options to sub-let, where rent is unaffordable to one artist. Restricted user clauses to maintain artist / maker focus.
- Partially open to the public (ground floor interactive space with a capacity of 50+ people)
- Property (over multiple floors?) with potential for minimum 3 or more private studios
- Sub divisible down to 80 sq m
- net internal floor space of 2,000 sq ft
- Electric, water and phone connections (or ability to easily connect)
- Location within 0.3 miles of Manchester Road Station
- Location within 0.3 miles of Burnley bus station

Desirable

- Ground floor street facing windows
- kitchen facilities or ability to fit
- High ceilings
- loading doors and parking
- outdoor space (could be a wide pavement).



ARTIST RUN SPACES
DEFINED BY THEIR ROLE
IN THE CITY. THEY ARE
"MEETING POINTS" OR
"CONTEXTS", NOT SPECIFICALLY
DEFINED BY THE ACTIVITY
OR WORK CARRIED OUT THERE.



- an artist cafe / kitchen
- an international artist residency space
- live work space for visiting artists
- project and exhibition space
- boutique shop
- art library and classroom
- after school club
- cinema
- office for arts organisation
- public meeting room
- performance venue
- space to do nothing / lounge

Creative Spaces: What are they...

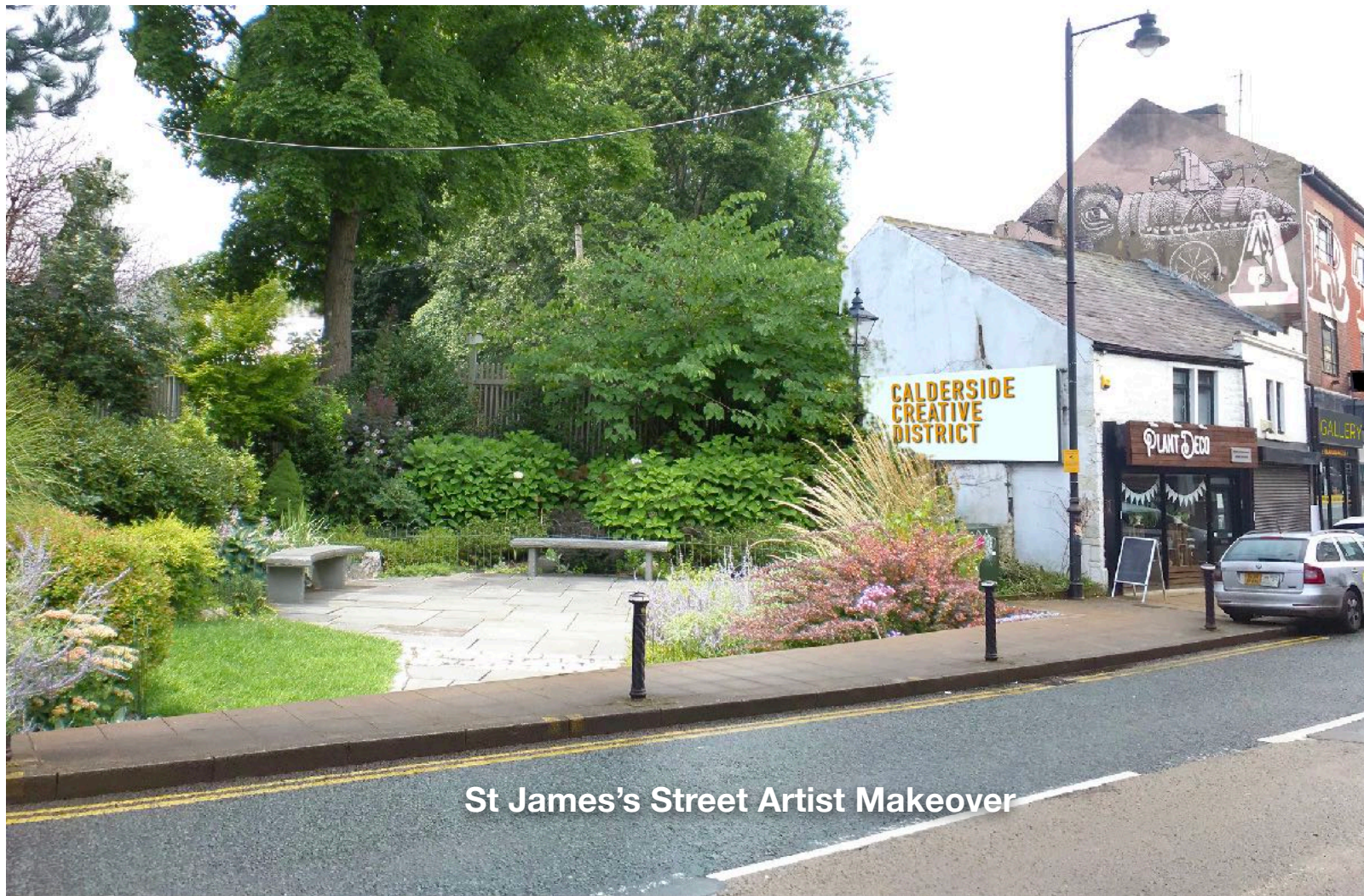
- A making space in Burnley for contemporary visual artists
- Multiple storey mixed-use development, including housing, work space and possibly shared workshops.
- Social hubs
- Project spaces
- Flexible, accessible community space to encourage and enable use by local residents
- Would complement co-working and employment support
- Potential to mix community uses and to complement other local commercial, community and leisure uses
Potential to link with business start-up loans and/or with local manufacturing
– e.g. interest in developing a local fashion district with small scale, high skill micro-manufacturing
- Could provide specialist tools and equipment, e.g. 3D printer, tool hire, depending on demand.

Some Objectives...

- Encourage artists to move easily between cities (Manchester/Preston/Leeds) and Burnley, and see this as useful to the development of their practice.
- Enable artists to benefit from the unique opportunities of both town and city (without committing to insecure, expensive or meanwhile premises in the Manchester, or losing access to growing markets by being too far from the action).
- To operate a commercial and sustainable business from the outset.
- Provide easier local access to contemporary visual arts, of international quality, made in Burnley.
- To remain artist-led and avoid the overheads associated with large arts organisations.
- To support the contemporary visual art community locally.
- To encourage artists to relocate permanently to the town and encourage arts graduates from Burnley to return to work casually in the town.
- To connect artists with a contemporary practice to traditional manufacturing and fabrication services in Burnley and surrounding areas.



St James's Street Today



St James's Street Artist Makeover

Speculations: Quick Wins

To ascertain demand interest from potential artists:

- Allow artists to colonise the street, using existing art and projects for low cost interventions.
- Build a programme of activity here now. Art openings in evenings could improve perceptions around safety.
- Build a summer events programme to create curiosity.
- Walking, Talking, Greening, (better quality) Street food.
- What about some creative residencies on the theme of Burnley's creative future?
- Community garden, artists' decoration on street lamps, bubble machines and mirror balls.
- Engage the landlords with property improvements like artist run shutter painting projects.
- Shutter painting festival. Zebra crossing painting. Bunting.
- Extension of existing activity / projects to St James's (Burnley Draws / Studio Tours with Creative Alliance)

Examples

1) St James's St Village



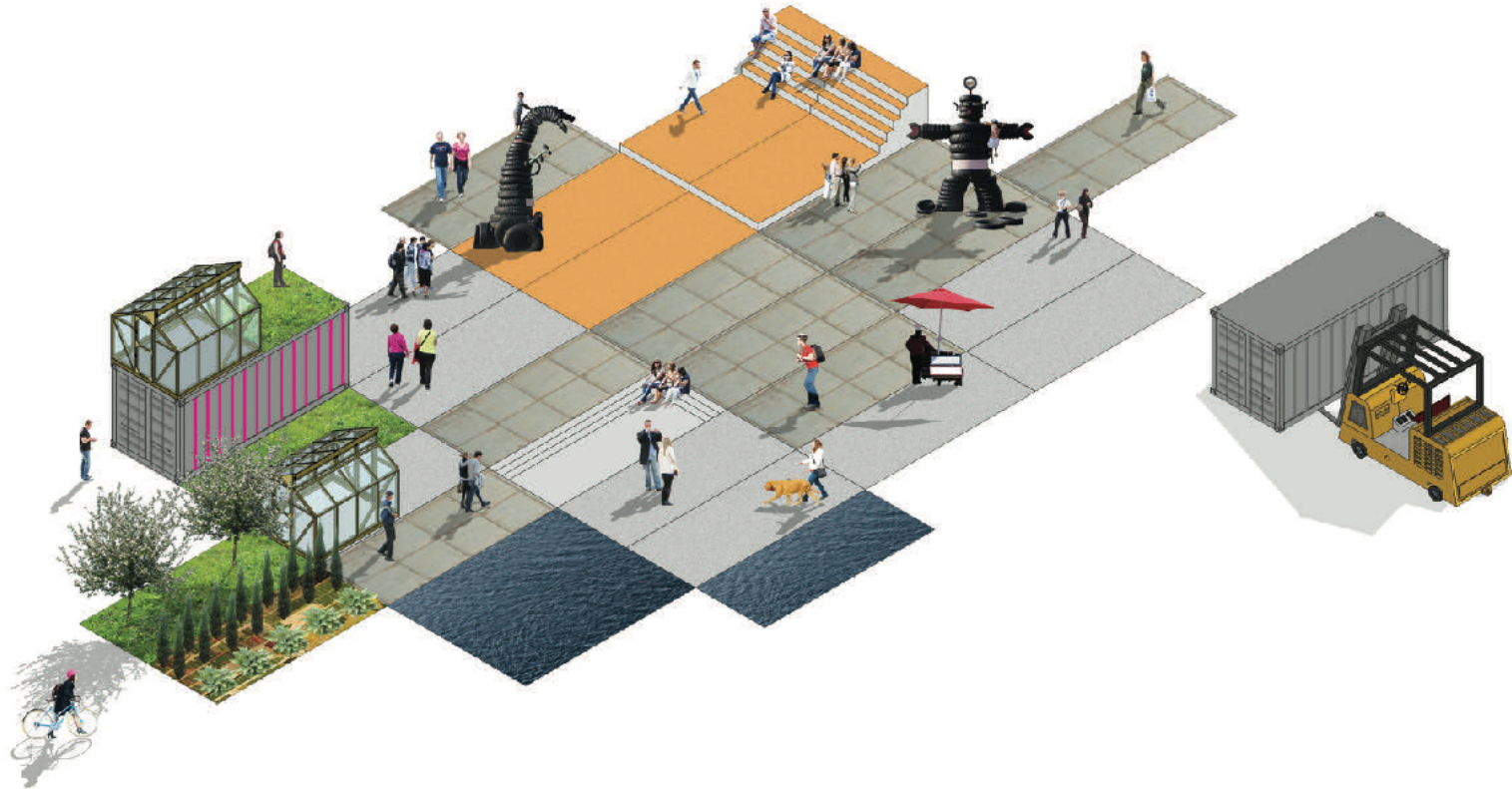
- Better if located slightly off the high street
- Easily subdivided
- Better density - upper floors tend to currently be vacant or used as storage.
- Shop depth on St James's is shallow and limited parking /on street space (not suited to casual shopping).
- River prevents practical use of rear. These spacial issues would not particularly affect artists.
- Could solve under occupancy of street level.
- Scalable - extra capacity can be added by buying adjacent properties.
- Easily converted to studios.
- Artist occupiers more sympathetic to Council's proposed Shopfront Design guidelines.
- Utilities usually already on site.
- Artist use of ground floor resolves upper floor access issues through retail space.
- No issue of secure parking if not residential.
- Artists improve facades / occupy the street.

Ground floor artist's project space / artist residency space / art related retail / pop up gallery / sympathetic independent retailer.

Upper floors, subdivided managed artist spaces.

Type of practice accommodated is determined by property's properties: Painters, illustrators, graphic designers, light materials (fabrics)= upper floors. Ceramics, metal, wood, furniture = lower floors, potentially with loading / extraction.

2) Container Campus



- Cheap, modular, scalable, secure.
- Can be stacked to create density.
- Proven and practical solution used in many cities.
- Temporary and recyclable
- Easy to integrate into new street plans, landscaping.
- Create new public realm. Let artists manage and curate it.
- 1 - 2 artists per 20ft container.
- Landmark development with a strong unique contemporary statement. Many marketing and branding opportunities.
- Although architecturally at odds with Victorian / Edwardian shops, containers fit sympathetically with industrial heritage.

For Liverpool based example see <http://whitecrate.co.uk>



3) Container Village



- Combines examples 1 & 2 above.
- requires significant buy-in and flexible approach to conservation area issues.
- Many façades on St James's Street are already irreparable, conservation status compromised.
- Extends footprint into street.
- Brings in light to upper floors.
- Creates a unique and dramatic arrival to Upper St James's
- Regional visitor attraction.
- Combined with a revised and upgraded public realm offer, the street could host events,
- Options for planting, bike parking, EV points.



4) Warehouse District



- Repurpose and recycle existing architecture.
- Deals with local oversupply of large Victorian warehouses.
- Requires minimum amount of work to divide.
- High density.
- Potential to phase occupation.
- High ceilings.
- High cost to maintain - heating / large roofs!
- All under one roof – including performance and event space.
- Keeps industrial heritage alive.
- Potential for larger living space.
- Easy access for practices requiring loading, large scale fabrication.
- Noise, storage and mess not an issue.
- Accommodate larger audiences.