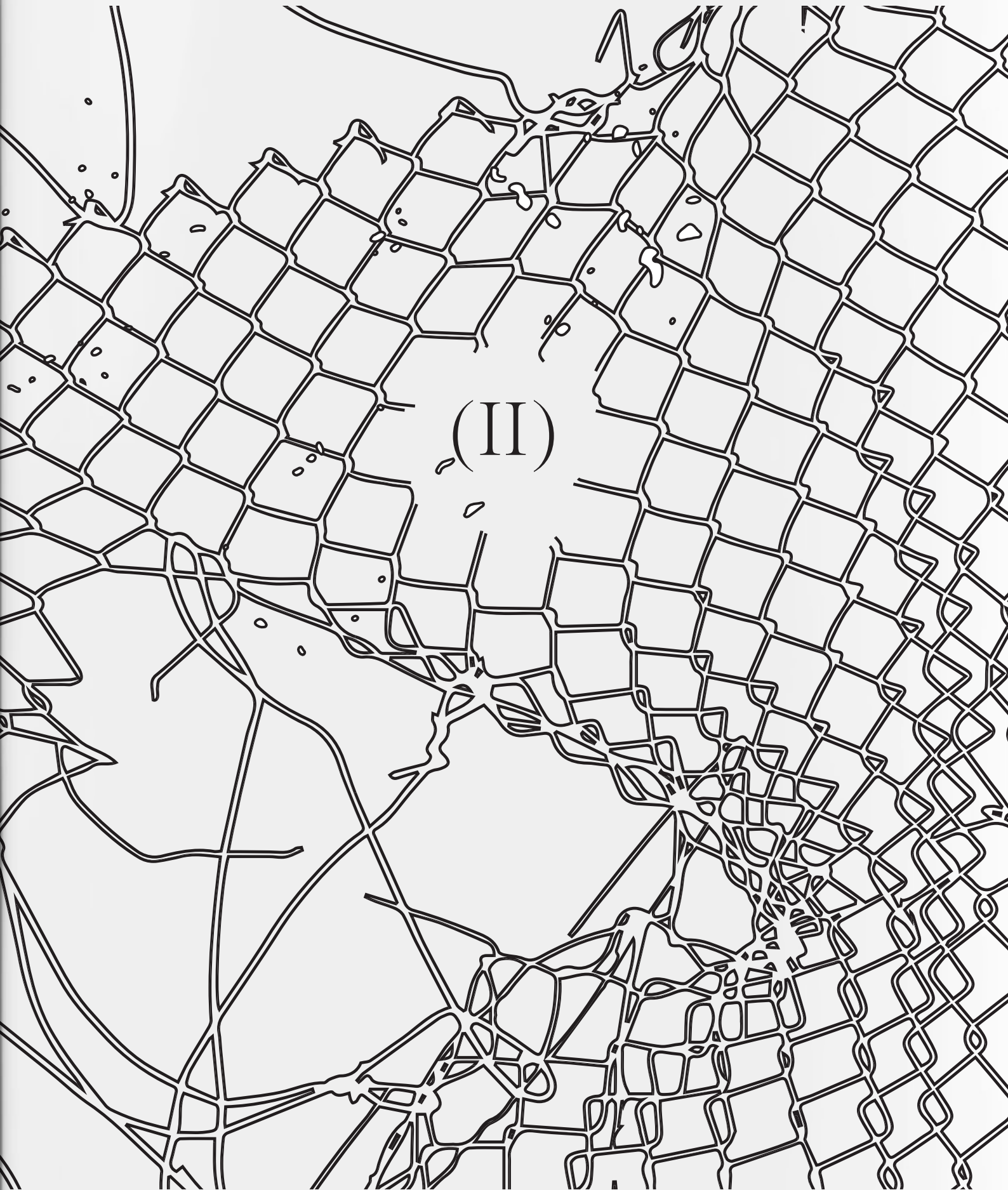


# MORE *meanwhile* THAN SPACES



# MORE THAN MEANWHILE SPACES II

Creative Enterprise/Action  
Zones – Exploring the Scope for  
Supporting Artist-Run Initiatives  
and Cultural Workspaces in North  
East England

Feasibility Report  
2019/20

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More Than Meanwhile Spaces II was a collaborative project run by an interdisciplinary multi-organisational team comprising academics at Newcastle University (Dr Emma Coffield, Dr Paul Richter, David Butler, Dan Goodman and Julie Monroe), The NewBridge Project (Rebecca Huggan), Northumbria University (Dr Rebecca Prescott) and Newcastle City Council (Robin Beveridge). It ran from March 2019-March 2020 and involved over 80 artists, creative practitioners, local authorities, funders, academics and interested parties.

The project picked up from a previous series of events (More than Meanwhile Spaces, March 2018-19) that explored long-term support for artist-run initiatives in Newcastle and Gateshead. A key point that emerged here was that artist-run initiatives and workspaces were often 'invisible' when it came to longer-term support, yet were absolutely vital for artists and creative practitioners (as also seen in the Creative Scotland Visual Art Review, where artist-run initiatives were 'ranked as number one in importance to all survey respondents (2016: 21)'). Through our discussions, it was proposed that the North East follow London's lead and establish something akin to a Creative Enterprise Zone – but there was little to no capacity in the field to take this idea further.

As a result, this second project aimed to bring a regional network of stakeholders together over a series of six events, and to use the Creative Enterprise Zone model as a stimulus for discussion – and action – in the North East of England (e.g. Northumberland, North Tyneside, Newcastle, South Tyneside, Gateshead, Sunderland and Durham, although representation from these areas differed across the project).

Through discussion, we identified the following areas of consensus:

1. Artist-run initiatives and workspaces underpin the cultural and creative sector in the North East of England. They are often vital spaces for artists and creative practitioners.
2. Artist-run initiatives and workspaces make a huge contribution to local communities, to skills and training, and to understandings of the North East as an attractive place to visit, live, work and invest.
3. Artist-run initiatives and workspaces are now in urgent need of long-term support. With only short-term or 'meanwhile' spaces made widely available, those who run artist-run initiatives and workspaces are at risk of exhaustion and collapse.
4. Long-term support for artist-run initiatives and workspaces, on the other hand, would allow those involved to invest in their buildings, creative programmes, associated artists and creative practitioners, staff and communities. Long-term support would free up years of time, currently lost to repeated relocation. That time (as well as the energies and resources saved) could be better used to grow and enrich the sector.
5. Long-term support needs to be developed from the 'ground up'. It must be tailored to existing practices and needs, developed in partnership, be sector-led, use appropriate mechanisms

and language, and be affordable and suitable for those in most need.

6. For long-term support to succeed, it also needs investment and support from the very top (e.g. in the North East this would need to include local and combined authorities, the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, Arts Council England, but also potentially private investors). Support does not always have to be financial. For example, it could include help-to-buy schemes and officer resource, but also mentoring, up-front investment in buildings, or access to specialist advice.

This report sets out, in more detail, conversations as they developed over the course of the project. It focuses on Creative Enterprise Zones, both because this was the model that<sup>0</sup> initially captured interest, and because we know that some local and combined authorities are starting to take steps in this direction. But we know that there are many other potential options by which artist-run initiatives, artists and creative practitioners might be afforded long-term support. To be clear, we do not wish to narrow down that conversation, or to throw our collective weight behind a single option. Rather, we wanted to use discussions of *and around* Creative Enterprise Zones as a means by which to drive action, of all kinds, across the North East.

We hope that this report is timely, and that it offers some support for those currently investigating how best to support artists and creative practitioners in the long-term.

*More Than Meanwhile Spaces II* was made possible by all those who shared their time and energy with us. We are deeply grateful to them.

– The Project Team  
Emma, Paul, Rebecca, Rebecca,  
David, Robin, Dan, and Julie.



# INTRODUCTION TO

# THE PROJECT

More Than Meanwhile Spaces II follows an event series that ran from March 2018-2019, titled More Than Meanwhile Spaces. This previous project brought a network of stakeholders together to debate long-term, sustainable support for artist-run initiatives, artists and creative practitioners. It resulted in a freely available publication (<https://morethanmeanwhile.wordpress.com/publications/>) and a series of co-developed, top-rated action points for the future.

Following feedback from the group, we knew that any follow-up work would need to be broader in scope than the first project, which looked to Newcastle and Gateshead only. We also knew from the top-rated action points that the idea of a 'Creative Enterprise Zone' (as recently established in London) in the North East had hit something of a chord, but that there currently was little to no capacity to take this work on.

More Than Meanwhile Spaces II thus took one possible model – and one with some traction in the group – and ran with it over a series of six events, workshops and discussions. We hoped that the event series might also act as a vehicle for broader discussions – enabling participants to meet each other, to share, and to borrow or co-develop ideas of all kinds, and at a variety of scales.

**\*Note: We use the term artist-run initiative here as an umbrella term that includes artist-led initiatives, galleries and spaces, DIY, grassroots and independent spaces, groups and initiatives – including those without a space - of all kinds and types. Their financial structure, funding sources, governance and strategic aims might be different but the commonality running throughout is that they are led by artists.**



# WHAT IS A MEANWHILE SPACE?

The term 'meanwhile space' is relatively new, but it is commonly used to refer to the short-term let of buildings offered to artists, creative practitioners and other groups (e.g. community groups, charities, small businesses etc.) at lower-than-usual rates. In general, meanwhile spaces tend to be offered by private developers, landowners or local councils, and the spaces themselves can vary enormously – from single rooms to entire blocks. In most cases, these arrangements are reciprocal. For example, a developer might let an artist-run initiative use part (or whole) of an empty building at a below market value cost, in return for having that building safely occupied. Similarly, a local authority might open up meanwhile spaces for a short period of time in order to drive

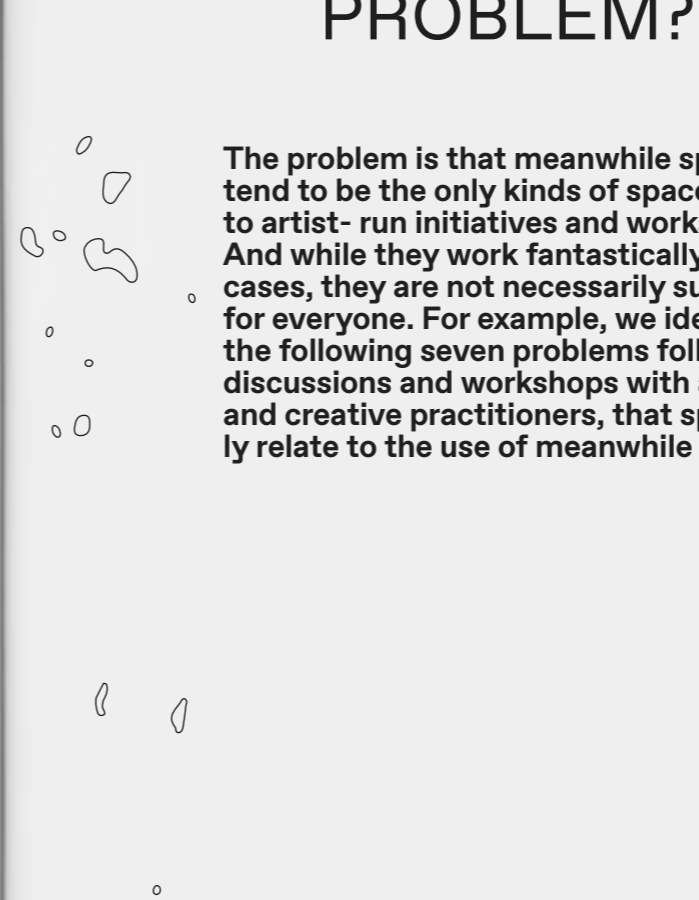
footfall or investment in a certain area. To be clear: meanwhile spaces are often brilliant. They can offer artists and creative practitioners space to work on a new idea, or to test something out. In moving from location to location, artists and creative practitioners can challenge themselves to work in new ways. Many of the artist-run initiatives we go on to detail in this report started out as meanwhile spaces, and some continue to use meanwhile spaces alongside other buildings and developments. In this report – and in all our work – we are in favour of meanwhile spaces, and we hope to see responsible, co-developed meanwhile spaces continue to be offered in the years to come, right across the region.



# SO WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

**The problem is that meanwhile spaces tend to be the only kinds of space offered to artist-run initiatives and workspaces. And while they work fantastically in some cases, they are not necessarily suitable for everyone. For example, we identified the following seven problems following discussions and workshops with artists and creative practitioners, that specifically relate to the use of meanwhile spaces:**

- 1. (Constant) relocation is exhausting, and drains time, energy and financial resources.**  
Artist-run initiatives can be asked to move at short notice, and often have to do so every few years. This amounts to an enormous drain in terms of time and energy. For example, when The NewBridge Project moved (to a building just around the corner) the move took years to plan, and five weeks to conduct. It drained financial resources that might otherwise have been used to support a creative programme.
- 2. Inability to invest in/grow programmes**  
Artists and creative practitioners in meanwhile spaces have little security, and regularly lose huge amounts of time relocating. For example, in the final five weeks of The NewBridge Project move alone, approximately six and a quarter years of collective time were lost. Similarly, artist-run initiatives that are moving constantly have less time to spend with artists and creative practitioners, and on their programmes.
- 3. Inability to invest in buildings and equipment**  
The buildings offered to artists and creative practitioners are often in poor repair, and are likely below acceptable standards. When artists and creative practitioners know that they will need to move again,





reasonably soon, they are less likely to want to invest in these buildings. Similarly, if artists and creative practitioners don't know what type of building they will be working in in the future, they will be reluctant to invest in equipment (e.g. printing presses, or kilns).

**4. Inability to innovate / grow**  
The lack of long-term stability means that artist-run initiatives and workspaces do not have the time or the resources to research other models, to innovate, or to 'scale-up' if they so wish. Not all artist-run initiatives and workspaces do want to grow in this fashion by any means – but some do and are hampered by the current situation.

Through our conversations with artists and creative practitioners, we also identified the following issues, each problematic more broadly in the sector but with the potential to cause further difficulties for those working in the short-term. For example:

**1. Assumptions around artistic practice**

It is very common to think that artists and creative practitioners will work for free, or for exposure. These kinds of assumption (which might also include expecting artists to behave, act or dress certain ways) are deeply old-fashioned, and can prevent artists and creative practitioners receiving fair payment and treatment.

**2. Wider socio-economic narratives and practices**

68% of artists in England have additional jobs to help make ends meet, while two thirds earn less than £5,000 from their art each year (Arts Council England 2018). There are also significant gender and medium-based pay disparities (ibid), and the forms of welfare support regularly cited by artists involved in artist-run initiatives in the 1960s-1980s are now unavailable.

**3. Widely-documented lack of diversity**

There is a widely-documented lack of diversity in the arts, and the Cultural and Creative Industries more broadly,

in terms of pay (Arts Council England 2018), racial exclusion (Saha 2018), and the reproduction of broader 'established prejudices and patterns of social advantage' (Banks 2017: 8) such as those relating to class, gender, minority groups and disability (see Littler 2018, McRobbie 2016).

**4. Fragile net works of support**

Networks of support exist in the North East, but these are often reliant upon a small number of individuals. If those individuals 'burn out' or relocate, that knowledge will be lost.

**5. Much of the work is 'invisible'**

Many artists and creative practitioners work – sometimes literally – behind locked doors. This can mean that it is difficult for others to understand and value the work that they do. Moreover, artist-run initiatives are often seemingly invisible when it comes to cultural plans, or even tourism, and are not regularly promoted or valued in the way that other kinds of arts venues are.

**6. Huge variety and breadth of artistic practices**

The strength of the art sector in the North East is in its variety. From film collectives, to photographers, to ceramicists, to painters, to socially engaged practices, to performance – every group is distinctive, and will have specific needs. This means there can be no simple, one-size-fits-all solution or answer.

**7. Communicating value**

Each artist-run initiative will offer something unique in terms of its artistic value, for example. But we might equally talk about the 'socio-economic value', 'civic value' or 'multi-sector value generation'. This isn't comfortable language for everyone, however, and some artists and creative practitioners are strongly resistant to attempts to reduce the arts to a cost-benefit analysis. Others are actively searching for ways to better articulate the wide-ranging benefits of what they do.

I'm doing this for the love of it – but I'd like to be able to pay my rent.

I work a lot with museum collections and heritage sites in my practice, so I'm not a studio based artist, but it's really important for me to have a space in which to store my stuff and think.

There is lots of space in Sunderland, but whether it's appropriate space for artists and how easy it is to get into that space is the challenge.

For the first five years we existed we didn't even have a sign, because we couldn't afford to invest in getting a sign, in case we had to move any day.

This is a political issue – it's about housing, it's about who owns the land, it's about developers displacing communities.

There is a lack of expertise about building management planning, and a huge reliance on voluntary labour – that's a huge draw on people's time and resources. We're all trying to make a living and that's getting harder.

We've only sat down once in five months – because everyone has a job that supports their studio, so finding a time when everyone is free to talk about what we want to do is impossible.

Artists can't pay a commercial rate. Art brings so much to a community, we bring this to the table instead, but the difficulty of explaining that to landlords, that it isn't intended to become a commercial thing.

This is the size we operate at. We don't want to grow and grow and grow. We'll collapse.

The thinking needs to come from a place, and the people that comes from that place, it needs to be rooted. It's about belonging to something that's more than just you.

You can have spaces for a month, and that's a really insecure place for artists to work and try and develop.





# WHY FOCUS ON

# WORKSPACES?

By 'workspace', we mean a wide variety of spaces set aside for cultural and creative production – which might include studio spaces and providers, shared offices and facilities, 'hot desks', or meeting and event spaces. Workspace, in this sense, is absolutely crucial to artists, creative practitioners, and to what might be termed the cultural ecology more broadly.

To put it simply – workspaces are where artists and creative practitioners make work, talk about and discuss that work, and, quite often, show that work too. Without workspaces in the North East we will have fewer artists and artworks, fewer exhibitions, fewer performances and activities. Artworks will need to be made in domestic spaces, or 'shipped in' from elsewhere. Artists will have to store all their materials at home, or throw them away. Work produced at a larger scale will be more difficult to produce.

Likewise, work that relies on shared resources (e.g. kilns, printing presses, even photocopiers) will be more difficult to produce. Artists will have fewer spaces to meet and share their ideas, and fewer dedicated support sessions. There will be fewer opportunities for interaction and friendship. And the knock-on effect of all of this will be fewer artists working in schools, hospitals, and in the community, in the region artists have chosen to call their home.

Existing workspaces in the region are particularly vulnerable to change and re-development, in part because of their size. Hundreds of artists and creative practitioners might work in a single building, and when that building goes, it can be extremely difficult to find affordable, appropriate space nearby. As the Greater London Authority argued in 2014, the availability of 'accessible and practical spaces for artists [...] allows artists and creative producers to continue to underpin the cultural and creative sectors as a whole' (2014: 5). The availability of workspace also works to attract and retain artists and creative practitioners. It sends a signal that they are welcomed and valued. Cities like London and Glasgow (O'Neill and Rogerson 2019: 46) have already recognised this, and have begun to act to protect and support workspaces (e.g. through the development of the Creative Land Trust in London).

It is important that the workspaces offered to artists and creative practitioners are affordable and suitable however. 'Affordable' may mean different things to different people. What is affordable in London might be considered extortionate in the North East, for example. However, when artists and creative practitioners rent a studio or workspace, this is often their highest professional monthly cost (Arts Council England 2018), and it is easy for artists and creative practitioners, especially at an early stage of their career, to be 'priced out' of spaces. Artists and creative practitioners are also frequently offered buildings in poor state of repair, and which need extensive renovations (e.g. buildings that have no working heating, or which contain asbestos). Accessibility is a major issue in buildings that have no working lifts.

In what follows, we consider the possible long-term support that might be offered for all kinds of artist-run initiatives and workspaces in the region. But we often focus on workspaces precisely because they underpin so much of this activity, and because they are so vulnerable.



# WHAT IS A CREATIVE ENTERPRISE ZONE (CEZ) AND HOW MIGHT IT HELP?

The idea of an 'enterprise zone' has been around for a while, mainly as a government sponsored area in which incentives, such as tax relief, are offered to businesses.

In 2017, 'Creative Enterprise Zones' were developed as part of London's Cultural Plan, with ten grants of £50,000 offered

to London boroughs to 'provide the conditions to help artists and creative businesses to put down roots in the areas they have helped regenerate' (Greater London Authority 2017: 5)

In order to be considered a Creative Enterprise Zone, interested local authorities in London had to demonstrate how they would provide the following:



**<sup>1</sup> Space:**  
Securing permanent, affordable, creative workspace and live-work spaces as well below market rents, and ensuring no net loss of space.

**<sup>2</sup> Skills and Support:**  
Building entrepreneurial skills and offering business support to artists, start-ups, sole traders and small businesses, and developing career pathways and opportunities for jobs within the creative industries and supporting sectors for local people from all backgrounds.

**<sup>3</sup> Policy:**  
Developing local plans with pro-cultural policies in planning, housing, business development, technology, super-fast broadband and infrastructure, and supportive business rates relief policies.

**<sup>4</sup> Community:**  
Embedding creative production in communities, creating socially-inclusive places and strengthening links with marginalised communities and education providers.

(Greater London Authority 2017: 9)

25 boroughs applied for the full funding package and six were selected in 2018. The winning 'CEZs' span the disciplines and areas commonly grouped together as the Cultural and Creative Industries (e.g. there are Creative Enterprise Zones that focus on artist workspace, but also Creative Enterprise Zones that concentrate on

fashion and advertising), and the means by which these zones were 'mapped' is very different (some are circles, some much more irregular shapes)

# CEZs IN THE NORTH EAST?

Clearly, this model is designed for London, and cannot simply be picked up and transplanted to the North East of England. For example, the dispersed geography of the arts in the North East makes the practice of 'zoning' much trickier – although more demarcated areas do already exist (e.g. Ouseburn).

Transport across the region can be patchy, limiting any overall sense of 'reach'. And there are huge disparities in the value of commercial buildings, land value, and the availability of spaces in general, which mean that some aspects of London's financial planning are much harder to implement (e.g. rate relief).

There are also issues with some of the terminology used here. For example, the term 'enterprise' works when considering the Cultural and Creative Industries more broadly (e.g. as applied to small, start-up businesses in advertising or gaming), but it doesn't capture or articulate the value of artist-run and grassroots art spaces. Notions of 'growth' can be difficult too, as they tend to imply a 'scaling up' of practice not feasible or desirable for all.

## WHAT MIGHT A CEZ OFFER?

However, the model presents opportunities too. For example, when we asked representatives from local councils and authorities in the North East of England, they mentioned:

- 1. Increased focus and clarity:** Zones (however they are described and implemented) give a focus, making it easier to take action
- 2. Profile and importance:** Zones and competitions create a 'buzz', and could be used to highlight and champion the arts in the North East
- 3. Drive investment:** Competitions can be used to drive investment, and to get 'buy-in' at the highest level
- 4. Protection:** CEZs protect existing artistic practices
- 5. Support:** CEZs also can be used to make a case for change, increased intervention and support
- 6. Mapping work:** The CEZ applications were underpinned by mapping work. This kind of work presents an opportunity to re-think current practice, to find out what is happening, where, what is changing, and to use this information to inform policy

- 7. Networks:** The effort that went into the CEZ proposals helped to develop co-operative and strategic networks – this could be the case in the North East too
- 8. Common aims and benefits:** Something like the creation of a CEZ creates an opportunity to identify common aims and benefits, to question the kinds of language used, and to find something that works 'from the bottom up'
- 9. 'Copy and Paste' benefits:** The reports associated with the CEZs (and potential CEZs) have a host of specific mechanisms which might be usefully copied or adapted. For example, it is now possible to adopt the 'agent-of-change' principle in planning documents to protect music and arts venues from housing development. The idea of mixed-use buildings, or of workspaces offering different rates to artists and creative practitioners is also attractive.

# EXISTING AREAS OF AGREEMENT

Our workshops also identified areas where there was already broad, cross-sectoral agreement. We have listed these areas below, both to document the key points that emerged from conversations, and as a potential starting point for any future work looking to understand and support artist-run activity in the region.



- 1. Talent:** everyone we spoke to agreed that the North East was a hotbed of talent, and while more artists and creative practitioners could always be attracted, any kind of planning for the future had to focus on what was already happening first.
- 2. An attractive place to live, work and invest:** there was an increasing awareness that artist-run activity helped to make the North East a cultural and creative place, and somewhere attractive to live, work and invest.
- 3. Tourism:** such understandings in turn drive tourism, and encourage new audiences to visit.
- 4. Students and graduates:** the North East has a number of leading universities and Higher Education providers, which attract students from all over the world. Increased support for artist-run initiatives and workspaces would encourage more graduates to stay, and develop practices in the region.
- 5. Investment in people, training and skills:** artist-run initiatives provide grassroots support and training for artistic practitioners at all stages of their career. Practice Makes Practice, for example, is an artist-run development programme at The NewBridge Project run by artists for artists and the wider arts community. It hosts an annual programme of events including mentoring, socials, crits and 'go pro' sessions (e.g. that offer tailored support for grant writing, or support with tax returns).
- 6. Investment in the community:** artists and creative practitioners make a huge contribution to local communities through the creation of new artistic work, artistic programmes and events open to all, as well as associated work in schools and hospitals, for example.
- 7. Need for support:** there was an increased understanding from those we spoke to that artist-run initiatives and workspaces in the region needed urgent, long-term support, protection, and security.
- 8. Variety of forms of support:** there was an awareness across the board that this 'support' was not just financial, but might take many forms (please see the later 'scenarios' for more details and suggestions).
- 9. Language:** no-one was particularly keen on the term 'enterprise' in 'creative enterprise zones'. 'Action' was one suggested alternative.
- 10. Potential:** perhaps most importantly, there was a shared understanding that artist-run initiatives had huge potential – and would be able to access this if the time spent on relocation could be re-invested into artistic practice and programmes.





# KEY CHALLENGES

Early workshops also flagged up some key challenges. Later sections in this report develop some of these ideas, but we thought it important to list them here first, as both a record of our conversations, and as a guide for anyone working with similar ideas elsewhere.

## 1. Who is the 'we'?

The London Creative Enterprise Zones are designed with the whole of the Cultural and Creative Industries in mind. Does it make sense in the North East to focus more specifically on artists, or artists and creative practitioners – where, for example, artists are understood to work independently, but creative practitioners work with clients of some kind, and could thus be charged higher rates? Or do we need to 'open up' to the whole of the Cultural and Creative Industries in order to get traction? What other kinds of grouping or bundling might make sense (e.g. libraries)? What impact might this have? What happens when the 'we' in conversations is misunderstood, or ill-defined? Who does 'we' include and exclude?

## 2. Defining the zone

What kind of zoning is appropriate in the North East? Should we be talking about zones - or should we try ribbons, or corridors, or hub and spoke models, or something else again? What is feasible? What happens to those 'left out'? Is zoning, in any form, appropriate – or should support be open to all?

## 3. Affordability

This means different things to different people. How do we make sure that workspaces really are affordable for those who need them?

## 4. Competitions

Competitions can be helpful – but they can also be harmful. How can we navigate this, so that everyone wins, or, at least, no-one loses?

## 5. Sustainability

How do we make sure that whatever is done, it works in the long-term? How do we avoid being in the same situation, having the same conversation, in five years time?

## 6. Terminology and the terms of debate

This can include, but it can also alienate. For example, discussions of enterprise and entrepreneurialism are easy for some art organizations, but strongly resisted by others. Similarly, 'growth' might imply an expansion of staff, assets or resource – but can we use it to talk about the 'growth' in creative programmes (and associated opportunities) that would occur if artists and creative directors had long-term security?

How else might we take control of key terms, or change them? Which terms can we live with, if we understand how they might benefit us? For example, can artists and creative practitioners accommodate, but not be reduced to, an economic 'cost-benefit' analysis? How might they make a civic or social case (in the way that the housing sector does) that would be equally compelling?



# SCENARIOS FOR

# THE FUTURE

It was clear from the beginning that a single, 'one-size-fits-all' approach would not work in the North East when considering long-term support for artist-run initiatives and workspaces.

Throughout the project, we used the idea of a Creative Enterprise Zone as a kind of 'hook' by which to explore a wide spectrum of possible forms of support, and to drive conversations and change.

In the penultimate workshop, we therefore proposed three possible scenarios, as follows:

**1. A North East Creative Action Zone (CAZ):** This was to be similar to the London model, in that it involved a competition and was open to any local authority in the North East.

**2. The Collaborative Model:** This borrowed key ideas from the London model, such as zoning and competitions, and involved more than one local authority working in partnership, but it did not stretch to the whole of the North East (e.g. it might involve two or three local authorities working together).

**3. Individual Approaches:** this final scenario looked at how local authorities or areas who did not want to adopt a Creative Enterprise Zone model might yet borrow ideas to improve the support offered to artist-run initiatives and workspaces.



Participants were asked to select a scenario of their choice, and discuss its feasibility in relation to five set questions. Those discussions were recorded, and information about each scenario was typed up and made available to participants for further discussion and comment.

However, in the very last workshop it became apparent that this 'scenario-based' approach was not the most useful to participants, and other ways of arranging and presenting the information were discussed.

We have taken these suggestions on board, and so present here: a statement on Creative Action Zones in the North East; a set of guiding principles for long-term support for artist-run initiatives and workspaces, and; key remaining challenges or areas of on-going discussion.

# NORTH EAST CREATIVE

# ACTION ZONES

In this scenario - the closest to the London model - we asked participants to imagine that we had established a competition for 'Creative Action Zones' that any local or combined authority in the North East of England might apply to. We chose the term 'action' rather than 'enterprise' as in previous workshops the term 'action' was suggested to be more appropriate. No-one selected this scenario.

This was primarily on account of the scale of the work. The kinds of collaboration and co-ordination, to say nothing of the funding, needed were widely viewed as unrealistic. There was also some resistance to the idea of a

'flashy' competition that would pit local authority colleagues, and artists and creative practitioners, against one another. However, others argued for a competition, noting that competitions could draw out ambitions, force people to take ideas seriously, and have wide appeal.

The rejection of this scenario is perhaps unsurprising. As mentioned throughout this report, a model cannot simply be 'picked up' from one place and 'dropped' into another. Rather, participants were more interested in seeing how this model might be adapted to better suit the North East of England.

We're all working together, to then pit people against each other is completely misunderstanding how people are working.

I think a competition can bring out less realistic ideas, because you're not thinking of the approach that is best, but the one that's going to appeal and win – the bells and whistles approach, what's going to have that wow factor. We should be strengthening what's already there, not doing something new and flashy.

Winning the 'City of Culture' is different to grassroots workspaces. That is a bells and whistles thing. This is about impact and support in the region.

If there isn't a competition – what's the alternative?

How do things get determined?

The development work is what is important, the potential. There's plainly a demand in Newcastle – but in other places the demand might be different.

# SHARED PRINCIPLES

Conversations around the remaining two scenarios resulted in a somewhat similar set of shared principles that it was broadly felt could underpin and guide partnership working of the kind needed to produce long-term change in the North East of England, at any scale (i.e. the principles might equally apply to a local area or a combined authority).

The following were identified as shared principles. Those listed in **bold** were 'star-rated' as having particular importance by participants.

**A better understanding of the social benefits:** it was repeatedly noted that artist-run initiatives and workspaces at times struggled to articulate a (non-economic) 'case' for investment and support. For example, it was suggested that the Star and Shadow Cinema had 'marshalled the right arguments' in order to get funding and support, but that others didn't know how to do this.

**Cross-sectoral collaboration:** multiple participants talked of the need for a consortium group with specific people involved so that all activity would be sector-led, but also strategic. This should include art organisations, representatives from artist-run initiatives and studio holders, and artists and creative practitioners who were not associated with a studio space, artist-run initiative or gallery.

**Mapping:** there was a sense that exploratory work was needed to assess the needs of those already working in the area, so that the right support could be offered. This was commonly held to involve some kind of mapping work, that might both improve knowledge of existing groups, activities and resources, and result in some kind of visual or diagram that linked groups together. Participants spoke of the need for this diagram not to be dominated by any one 'centre', but instead to adopt a campus, hub-and-spoke, node, network or 'metro-map' approach so that all those identified were represented equally.

**Development work:** once the mapping work had been conducted, it was felt that a package of development work was needed to support the various groups and communities identified. This would need to be based on detailed knowledge of what was already happening. For example, it could include pilot projects to test ideas before they were expanded out (potentially to the rest of the region). A 'deep' pilot (i.e. limited in number, but detailed) was thought to be more useful than a 'broad' pilot (i.e. lots of zones, but generating less detail and resource). It was also suggested that pilot projects be run both in areas that could generate new value(s), as well as in areas that were riskier, or that might not generate the same kinds or levels of value. Another key finding here was that while 'skills' were mentioned in passing in multiple conversations, there was no clear articulation of what this might actually mean or involve. Development work might thus seek to more clearly identify this in relation to artist-run initiatives and workspaces.

**Buy-in:** direct involvement by, and commitment from, local authorities, funders and other strategic partnerships was considered to be vital. It was strongly felt that there needed to be clear and active commitment to support artist-led initiatives and workspaces from 'the top'.



**Investment:** this did not have to be financial, but might include support for pilot projects, officer resource within local authorities or areas, or upfront investment in buildings (rather than cash), as well as mentoring and the sharing of expertise.

**Changes to policy:** a key area for change concerned writing artist-led initiatives and workspaces into the heart of arts policy and planning (rather than positioning this as an 'add on'). Changes here could include those made to planning policy (e.g. with regards subsidised spaces

making a proportion of all workspace affordable), but also championing artist-led initiatives and workspaces in cultural policy and plans more broadly.

**More spaces to be made available:** the final top-rated action point concerned there being more spaces made available for longer-term uses, on top of existing 'meanwhile' provision.

Other suggestions included:

**Knowledge brokers:** making nominated council officers available and visible, to better support artists and creative practitioners by acting as a point of contact, as well as working internally across departments to help to break down silo thinking, and offer 'joined-up' support. The feasibility of this being given as a task to just one person was raised, and the possibility of a regular working group offered as a potential alternative.

**Improved infrastructure:** existing transport links and general infrastructure across the North East were not felt to be adequate.

**Training and support:** increased training might include, for example, artists and creative practitioners having access to additional council officers with relevant expertise (e.g. in building safety and redevelopment), or council officers taking on 'care-taker' roles.

**Access to basic resources:** this might include giving artists and creative practitioners shared access to a warm room, a photocopier, or printer used by their local council. An added benefit here would be the encouragement of networking and knowledge sharing.

**A case for developers:** participants spoke of the need to 'sell' the above (as non-profit work) to developers, and potentially of some kind of tool-kit or phrase-bank that might help them 'make the case'. Community involvement would be vital here.

**Lobbying:** finally, participants spoke of the need to lobby (local) government in order to shift thinking towards support for this kind of long-term work. Again, the idea of a phrase-bank was suggested, with 'evidence' that might be 'copy and pasted' - even as an example of activity elsewhere.

How might mapping include people who deliver a lot of stuff intermittently over time in various locations - but don't have a space?

Does that get mapped? What are individual artists doing? How are they working?

We need a really clear understanding that the council has stepped up to and is committed to support. Not just random chats, or 'yeah yeah, we'll help, we'll see what we can do', but a really clear, translatable commitment and the council there on the ground as an active partner.

These metrics don't work for government, we need a lobbying exercise to look at how we try and shift government thinking - it can be done, we're seeing attitudes change towards transport, for example. Well, why couldn't the same be true of the Cultural and Creative Industries?

From a developer's point of view art is an add on, it's something that happens at the end if there is money left over. It should be there from the start.

To stay open to different models is really important - groups of artists can and are delivering these kinds of things, and we need to keep an eye out for them.

There's a different audience there, who aren't necessarily going to display work, purchase work, or play work - if it's gaming - but they benefit from it from a health point of view - and there's a whole other layer of links going on there.



# KEY CHALLENGES

While the above were largely agreed upon, there were some areas for activity that remained challenging. We have grouped and listed these below.

There was some discussion around who might benefit from long-term support. For example, for some participants it was vital that there continued to be a dedicated focus on artists and creative practitioners – to stop them getting lost in any larger grouping. Others tended to recognise an existing mix of practices, which included artist-run initiatives and workspaces alongside charities, community groups as well as residential and commercial groups.

In general however, there was agreement that any action needed to identify existing communities first, and then to find appropriate forms of support so that those communities might grow. The term 'communities' was deliberately broad in this discussion, so as to include all those who were already practising regardless of how that practice might be described (e.g. it might include artists and creative practitioners, but also those who identified as working in craft, design, architecture, games etc).

In this sense, the focus was on inclusive support and growth for a number of beneficiaries already working in the area, rather than support that was restricted to any one group (as per London's Creative Enterprise Zones). Concerns here included that a Creative Action Zone might be too prescriptive and thus miss or exclude non-arts groups who nevertheless already played an important role in existing communities of support.

One idea was that artists and creative practitioners might 'self-nominate' for increased levels of support from the ground up, and that that support could then in turn be tailored to existing practices and needs.

## WHO IS THIS FOR?

## COMPETITION

There was very little in the way of consensus when it came to the idea of competition. For example, some participants pointed out that competitions could be wasteful of time and energy (particularly if you didn't win), and were potentially harmful, in pitting colleagues or artist-led initiatives against one another. On the other hand, some participants spoke of competitions as driving action and energy.

A number of solutions were suggested. For example, it could be that areas or workspaces were 'identified' (or 'self-selected', as suggested above) and were then assessed based on need, with varying amounts of funding, and/or tailored packages of support offered. This 'everybody wins something' approach was hoped would avoid an 'all or nothing' result.

## ZONES

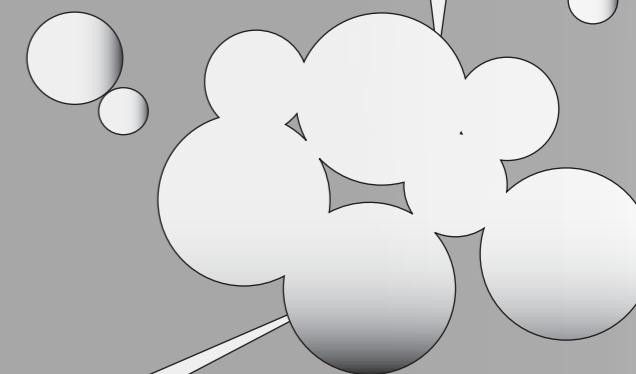
As with competitions, zones were considered problematic in that they created 'in' and an 'out' groups, rather than offering support for all. However, support for everyone was not considered to be feasible – whereas the very targeted nature of a zone could provide focus and clarity.

Solutions here included the potential to offer a suite of options that might then be tailored to suit particular groups, wherever they were based. It was also reiterated that 'zones' could be used as a way to test packages of support, which might then be 'rolled out' more broadly.

Strangely I find myself drawn to the idea of a competitive process. I think it ups your game, your thinking, it will force the mind of those bidding. As long as there is a reasonable chance of success.

What if it's competitive, but not a competition?

I'm really against competition because I think it is really wasteful. The amount of resources that we're putting into competitive bids [...] it's the whim of whoever is marking your submission and it seems like such a wasteful approach.



Zones are great in you're in Ouseburn, but what if you're in Shieldfield? What do I get if I move into a zone?

What if you are the catalyst that perhaps gentrifies an area?

If you have a zone that has a package of support and that support is restricted to that zone you're creating competition already, internally, within the community you're trying to support – because then they are either in or they are out. Support for me is more about, what are the links between where everybody is now and how do you improve the links? This [a zone] could exclude everyone in the countryside, who are doing really creative things as well.



## LONG-TERM ASSETS AND OWNERSHIP

Questions were raised as to how work could be made sustainable in the long-term – particularly as local authorities and other funders typically have a three to five-year funding period. There were also questions around the ownership, acquisition and management of assets. Who owns what within the sector? How have artist-run initiatives (and similar groups) raised affordable finances to purchase buildings? What kinds of borrowing or rates are available? There were also questions about the suitability of some buildings, noting that many were in poor condition.

Emphasis was placed on up-front investment in buildings and models that allowed artist-run initiatives and workspaces to become financially independent over a period of time. Greater knowledge sharing was also recommended.

There are sustainable models that get that capital injection at the start. We can invest heavily at the beginning, but expect people to be independent by year five. This notion that you are going to receive subsidy in perpetuity is outdated.

If people owned their own buildings, they can break even – and that includes a person who can keep it all going. Longevity gives you that potential to weather the storm.

Is there a role for local authorities in saying, we've put in up to - whatever - over the next five years for people to draw down as long-term mortgage support? With longer terms and lower interest rates? And if we did it collectively we can spread the risk.

Other sectors have incubators and multi-role buildings – they're grant funded. There is a similar model there, it's acceptable, because of the return on investment.

## GEOGRAPHY

Geography remained a sticking point, particularly when it came to who might be included/excluded and how this might be managed in local authorities (e.g. Gateshead) that covered both large urban and rural areas. It was also noted that strong working relationships might be established that did not correspond to the remit of the new Combined Authorities

(e.g. as in Newcastle and Gateshead), and that local authorities were very different socially and economically. There were others kinds of complications too. For example, it was reported that artists and creative practitioners in Northumberland often worked from home, but whether this was through choice or necessity was not clear.

## OTHER CHALLENGES

1. Articulating, measuring, and evaluating 'success' in the arts, and in relation to projects of this nature.
2. Public perceptions and understandings of art, particularly when funded by a local authority (e.g. artists and creative practitioners spoke of having to 'defend' their practices when members of the public asked why arts funding hadn't been allocated to health care, or parks, instead).
3. Continuity - it was recognised that a

- small number of key people hold a great deal of knowledge in the North East, which might be lost if they were to move or work elsewhere. How then to retain and share this expertise?
4. How do (or should) 'bigger' institutions contribute to this work?
5. How to support artist-run initiatives that didn't (and didn't plan to) involve studios, given that this was the key repayment model used in the sector?





# SUMMARY AND THANK YOU

Over 80 people took part in this project and we would like to thank each and every one of them again for their continued support and enthusiasm. Indeed, we would like to thank them for their generosity in sharing so much with us through open discussion. Clearly, there is an appetite for longer-term support for artist-run initiatives and workspaces – something that we believe must start with a greater understanding of how much such spaces contribute to the region, and a clearer indication of how much they are valued. We want to see artist-run initiatives and workspaces shouted about in cultural policy, protected in planning, and championed by all. We want to see the sector flourish, as it undoubtedly would if it were given the promise of a stable future.

We also recognise that a Creative Enterprise Zone isn't the answer for everyone, and that the ideas and discussions documented in this report are, of course, only part of the picture. Over the course of the project we heard of other, similar models (e.g. Heritage Action Zones, the Future High Street Fund) that might equally be used to drive change in the sector and provide long-term support for artist-run initiatives and workspaces in the region.

Our hope is that whatever model proves to be the starting point, the discussions detailed here, and the points raised in the Executive Summary will prove a **useful starting point for action, and for change.**

As a quick taster of the kinds of change we are hoping for, we asked our participants to identify their own next steps – and found replies that suggested a renewed positive attitude towards change, artists and creative practitioners acting as 'change agents' by diversifying the voices in the room, and a commitment to cross-sectoral collaboration and knowledge sharing.

We realise that some of this is ambitious – but we firmly believe that it is also necessary and achievable. We feel that there is now serious momentum behind this work. The time has come to support artists and creative practitioners in the North East of England, and to take firm action.

As a team, we will follow up with participants in the coming months to find out what has happened as a result of the project, what remains challenging, and how we might help in the future. As always, we will be looking for ways to support artists and creative practitioners in the long-term. If you would like to contribute to this, have a suggestion, or would like to get involved in a potential project, please contact Dr Emma Coffield at [emma.coffield@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:emma.coffield@newcastle.ac.uk).

The Project Team  
Emma, Paul, Rebecca, Rebecca,  
David, Robin, Dan, and Julie

I will prepare a proposal for a Creative Action Zone in Newcastle.

I will research £/sq ft relationship between various uses of space to help make the case for off-setting poorer £ return by greater social/cultural/wellbeing return.

Ask existing artists about their current workspace and ideal studio/needs.

I will set up a meeting to map existing art users in Gateshead.

Treat the local authority with far less suspicion.

I will pay more attention to the way other art spaces exist/fund and continue to search for a sustainable model/support.

Think more about how I can independently facilitate meanwhile spaces and follow up on collaborations/networks built during these sessions.

Explore role as a facilitator/catalyst for artists/makers to engage with market in order to move toward their own financial sustainability.

Will continue to ensure new voices come into discussions - and not just same people in the room now - to make sure these conversations are discussed with multiple stakeholders.

Will aim to join up similar discussions and reports across country. **STRONGER TOGETHER.**



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#### Final word

**At the time of finalising this report, the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. Given current predictions about the social and economic fallout of the pandemic, there is the danger of a negative impact on investment in arts and cultural activity. Our hope is that, on the contrary, the current situation amplifies the value of this activity, and the innovation and vigour of artists' and creative practitioners' responses to it. As a team, we believe that the issues we focus on in this report have never been so salient.**

