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# No Time to Waste...

The Meanwhile Use of Assets for Community Benefit

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# Foreword

“Curtsey while you’re thinking what to say, it saves time.”

This plea for multi-tasking from Lewis Carroll’s otherwise unappealing Duchess captures something about the ‘meanwhile’ approach. At times over the past year it has felt like we were indeed living through the Looking Glass where the practical world is unexpectedly interwoven with nonsense. The challenges can only be met with creative, counter-intuitive and above all efficient approaches. We all know this is no time for waste.

The ‘meanwhile’ use of assets, which resonates with the public because it seems so straightforwardly sensible, became part of government policy for Revitalising Town Centres in April 2009. A grant to the Development Trusts Association for rapid development work on the subject was approved within weeks but the grant agreement did not arrive until March 2010. All the work described in this report was done at speed and at risk. Not for the first time the community sector was bank-rolling the Government.

Meanwhile projects on the ground often find themselves circling the bureaucracy in ever-increasing frustration. Just one example – a youth arts project addressing the spiral of decline at a secondary shopping centre was held up for weeks by being asked for a Flood Risk Assessment as part of their temporary change of use application. While ‘red tape’ is an old enemy, the incredible slowness of the existing methods of private retail occupation has been an eye-opener. It literally takes months to get the simplest tenancy agreement; there are always lawyers available to prevaricate but not, it seems, to progress mutually-agreed solutions for owner and occupier. Too often they serve the law but not the customer.

Enough complaining... we have been jumping over, slicing through, and tearing down these hurdles. The Meanwhile Project has demonstrated that by seeking out and releasing the latent energy and creativity in communities, unused and empty assets can be the key for achieving win-win solutions. By supporting social enterprises, community groups or enterprising individuals to access and create activity in empty spaces, a former problem has been turned into a cost effective and accessible resource.

At its simplest, Meanwhile activity delivers better places in which to live, work and play. Meanwhile projects can also be catalysts for innovation and energy, converting empty



Pictured: Brixton Light Works, BOSI

spaces into opportunities to generate enterprise and employment, to trial and develop ideas and to provide new creative, community uses in unexpected places.

Barriers do exist but it is in the nature of ‘Meanwhilers’ – typically community based, micro-entrepreneurs – to use their energy, nous and tenacity to overcome these. The local authority performs best in a backseat supporting capacity rather than leadership role. Central government has its work to do to, continuing to explore what parts of the planning, rates and licensing systems need tweaking to allow community enterprises to take control of wasted resources in their high streets, commercial and residential centres. Over the past 12 months we have shown how far a small, flexible resource pot can be stretched through hands-on delivery to help meanwhile flowers bloom all over the country.

As Meanwhile enters the mainstream, as there is less tolerance of wasted space alongside a more do-it-yourself attitude, the removal of these barriers will be vital so as not to choke the energy and innovation that is propelling this movement forward. The Meanwhile Project will continue to work, ideally with the support of the new Government, to raise the profile and understanding of meanwhile activity, reduce the systemic barriers and help make things happen. Across the country, in place of empty buildings and land sites that cause blight and waste resources, will be hotbeds of innovation, creativity, enterprise and community activity – all in spaces that would otherwise be dead.

**Jess Steele, Development Trusts Association  
Project Executive for the Meanwhile Project**

# Introduction



Pictured: Changing Spaces, Cambridge



THE Meanwhile Project arose from a policy intervention and became a programme of ground-level projects, but at heart it is really a philosophy. It is about recognising that assets exist in time as well as space and that an empty building represents a social and economic objective unrealised. Temporary or short-term doesn’t mean unimportant – think lightning, blossom, a festival.

Led by the Development Trusts Association and Meanwhile Space, the Meanwhile Project has directly supported 24 projects in 17 very different places all over the country, since June 2009. In addition, the Project has provided advice, guidance and networking to over 700 owners, local authorities, and potential occupiers, including through the innovative Meanwhile Ning (the social networking site for meanwhile interests). Alongside direct project support, the programme has produced a range of legal and technical help including the Meanwhile Lease, two model licences for meanwhile land use, and guidance on business rates and planning. It has also included a series of week-long live training events run by the Empty Shops Network, an Empty Shops handbook, a manual for intermediaries and a set of very small ‘Go and See’ grants to enable meanwhilers to visit other projects. As the über-network for meanwhile, the Project also drew together other meanwhile support organisations into the Meanwhile Coalition, ensuring a coherent, collaborative approach and avoiding duplication.

Recent research by SQW\* has estimated that there are over 250 meanwhile projects in place or in preparation in

the UK today and that this figure is growing. The majority of projects are presently in deprived urban areas. Nearly 75% are in vacant retail units but other types of space are increasingly being brought into use, including offices, empty homes, pubs, car showrooms and delayed building sites. There are evident benefits for all stakeholders including private owners, community groups and the wider public. There are some modest costs and risks but the new Meanwhile Lease and support from the Meanwhile Project “manages the risks effectively and the costs are very modest, particularly in comparison with the benefits”. Overall, the savings for each of the groups of stakeholders in both the short term and long term makes meanwhile use “a viable and intelligent option... a relatively simple and effective way of making efficient use of existing property assets”. The research concludes that “support provided by government so far has helped to build the momentum... Further modest investment at this point would help ensure that meanwhile use becomes an integral part of how the public and private sector manage their assets efficiently.”

This report provides an overview of the projects supported to date, presented in the order in which they were agreed, in two phases. Phase 1: ‘Explore, Develop & Test’ was undertaken with support from the Asset Transfer Unit as part of DTA’s wider Advancing Assets for Communities programme. Phase 2: ‘Consolidate & Showcase’ was funded directly by Communities & Local Government. It is a characteristic of Meanwhile that things are changing quickly and all the time, which leads to some rather odd grammar, and particularly a mix of tenses. We have not tried to standardise the text because this captures the essence of meanwhile – *making it happen right now*.

\* ‘Meanwhile Use: Business Case and Learning Points’, SQW Consulting May 2010

# Phase 1 Projects



Left to right: Margate Windows of Opportunity, Scarborough Shop Lift, Cambridge Changing Spaces

Our very first award of support, in July 2009, was to two projects in Margate.

The Studios project involves HK Design moving from Muswell Hill to Margate, taking over an old casino building in the centre of town, between the clocktower and the sea. HKD are expected to make a significant contribution to the burgeoning creative sector in this arty/deprived seaside town.

**Windows of Opportunity** had already transformed several shopfronts in Margate and with Meanwhile Project support would take on 10 more individual shopfronts in combination with a larger frontage space in the local shopping centre where the owner is keen.

Intensive development work continued in Cambridge, Hastings, and Scarborough. We also considered Northumberland, Brighton and Mortlake (SW London). We briefly identified a potential solution for the Bradford Hole - remote-controlled diggers as part of a circus-type event that can last for a week or more. **The**

**People's Supermarket** were pinning down their location – it still looked like it was going to Brixton. We provided a non-committal letter of support.

Like all our first tranche of projects Scarborough was already enthusiastic about the potential of Meanwhile.

Using a stable and well-established infrastructure for Scarborough's renaissance, the projects combined

benefits for residents and tourists by providing intriguing high street animation connected to the history and characters of the area, and a community engagement base for a major heritage tourism bid.

**Scarborough Shop Lift** - Crescent Arts created living art productions in numerous window spaces along the high street, the major link between the town centre and seafront. This will not only add to the animation of the high street space and provide users of all sorts with some interaction, but will also provide participation and educational workshops.

The other project was to support a dedicated group of volunteers in developing their lottery bid for a new **maritime heritage centre**. In the meanwhile they took over an empty shop as a prototype centre for visitors and local people, to achieve far better engagement in their bid than if they wrote it all by email or round the kitchen table.

Cambridge was also quick off the mark to think 'Meanwhile'.

The City Centre Partnership, Love Cambridge, responded to the threat of empty units throughout the town by co-ordinating interested parties from the public, private and voluntary sectors to engender a Meanwhile ethic. Driven by Love Cambridge and the City Council, with senior-level engagement from institutional and corporate landlords, Changing Spaces animated empty shops through film, helped co-ordinate meanwhile activity at an authority level and inspired others to create meanwhile projects with diverse outcomes around the city.



Left to right: Hastings Arthur Green. (photo on right by Adam Piggott)

**Beginspace** is an ideas hub created by CityLife through their Social Enterprise Centre. Taking advantage of a high street presence enabled CityLife to access passers-by and town centre users, young and old, in a way that their established city-fringe location didn't allow. Using local print, digital and broadcast media, the mentor drew in ideas for new businesses and social enterprises and worked with these ideas (and their owners!), to shape them into feasible business plans that will seek funding in a 'Dragon's Den' type finale. The nascent enterprises continued to be supported by CityLife at the Social Enterprise Centre.

In Hastings, the Meanwhile Project has been working alongside the Council's Retail Vitality scheme and has supported a wide range of projects jointly.

After some small-scale projects to open up premises such as fumigating a shop to get rid of pigeon detritus – we worked on the worked on the **Old Halifax Building**. One of the most prominent buildings in the town centre, it was bought freehold by the café next door who wanted a

meanwhile use to tide them over and help develop footfall while they waited for planning permission. A former building society and estate agents, it is a high quality space, four storeys high with large window displays on two sides. A mix of local artists came together as Nomad and signed participation agreements with Meanwhile Space CIC who took on risk as intermediary landlord using the (at that time still draft) Meanwhile Lease. The owners are currently (May 10) redeveloping the space but have shown interest in the artists continuing to use the upper floors.

The second Hastings project was **Arthur Green**, an 1870s military tailor's shopfront on the seafront taken on by the Hastings Pier & White Rock Trust as a visitor centre and retail space pending their acquisition and redevelopment of the Pier itself. The trust has used the base to engage with local people and develop successful new products like their historic railway posters.

During this phase we also worked closely with The People's Supermarket and monitored the Westfield Hole, a delayed shopping centre development site in the centre of Bradford.



Left to right: Cambridge Beginspace, Hastings old Halifax Building

# Phase 2 Projects



Left to right: Camden The People's Supermarket, Leeds Seacroft Digital Lounge, Acton London former post office

We continued to discover and develop projects all over the country, providing a mixture of encouragement, networking, technical advice, showcasing and grant support to make things happen.

We also stayed with the projects supported during the 'explore, develop and test' phase – Margate, Cambridge, Scarborough, Hastings, Bradford and The People's Supermarket.

#### The next tranche of Meanwhile projects supported included:

**The People's Supermarket, Camden.** After an excruciating period of location-seeking (led by the charismatic Arthur Potts-Dawson and captured by Channel 4), they pinned down a location in Lambs Conduit Street, Camden. The old supermarket that had formed a magnet for undesirables (cheap booze, fags, dusty old groceries) closed suddenly last summer (the newspapers for 18th June are still in the shop!). It's a good-sized space, needing renovation but eminently suitable for conversion into a genuine community-owned supermarket. The business model sees up to 7,000 people buying £25 shares and committing to give 4 hours of their time per month. So far we had pledged £15k and in February we agreed a further £10k specifically for fascia works.

**Seacroft, Leeds** – the new development trust LS14 is taking over an empty corner unit in a parade to create

a Digital Lounge, the first community-run space in the area. Our support is helping with the refurbishment and purchase of a full set of mobile digital equipment.

**Action Acton, London** – this longstanding development trust will take over a closed double-fronted post office shop on the Bello Estate to extend the reach of their services to the estate. The new premises will house information/advice/guidance and job search for unemployed adults and young people; training in Skills for Life and ESOL for local residents; free access to computers and the internet through UK Online centre; Be Your Own Boss training in enterprise; a food co-op emerging from the existing weekly outdoor fruit and veg stall on the estate; enterprise support in becoming a street market trader. Other ideas include computer and bicycle recycling projects and a community arts/photo workshop.

**Arcade Arts, Carlisle & Penrith, Cumbria** – we provided match funding to a council grant to support two arts projects using empty shop units in Carlisle arcades to develop an 'arts hotspot', and to make a link with the Eden Arts project in Devonshire Arcade, Penrith.

We continued to talk up the **Bradford Hole** and were, of course, delighted when pressure by local people, in the form of an ArtAttack led by Spartacus, brought Westfield and Bradford MBC to the table. They agreed to withdraw the hoardings to a core site, releasing 4 acres of land to be converted meanwhile into the Bradford Urban Garden, and each committed £100k to make the site safe. They have since been joined as partners in the project by Yorkshire Forward. Our grant of £25k to Fabric, the umbrella arts



Above left: London Leegate Shopping Centre Top right: Southampton Northam Road Bottom right: Dover Sainsbury's site

organisation, will develop it from a flat site to a park space ready to be animated by arts and community projects. In March 2010 we agreed another **Bradford** project proposed by Fabric – an empty shop in a flagship building on Centenary Square, five years old and never been let. Within a week the shop was used for a pop-up cinema as part of the Bradford City of Film Festival. It is an enormous space, with an even bigger mezzanine floor that stretches over Starbucks and will by 2012 overlook the proposed mirror pond in the new City Park.

The set of grant agreements from 19th March 2010 were almost the last to be supported from this tranche of funding.

In addition to the first phase projects (Margate, Cambridge, Scarborough, Hastings and Bradford) and those from November 2009 (Camden, Leeds, Acton, Carlisle & Penrith) we added support for the following projects:

**Leegate shopping centre in Lee Green, SE London** is one of the hardest-hit secondary retail centres. It has been in a spiral of decline for at least a decade so the recession appears only to have explained the problem rather than caused it. Here, as elsewhere, Meanwhile offers the energy and urgency to puncture the usual waiting game between developer and council, to bring empty units into use for young people and the wider community while building a platform and a track record that can win the community organisations a place at the table in planning the future.

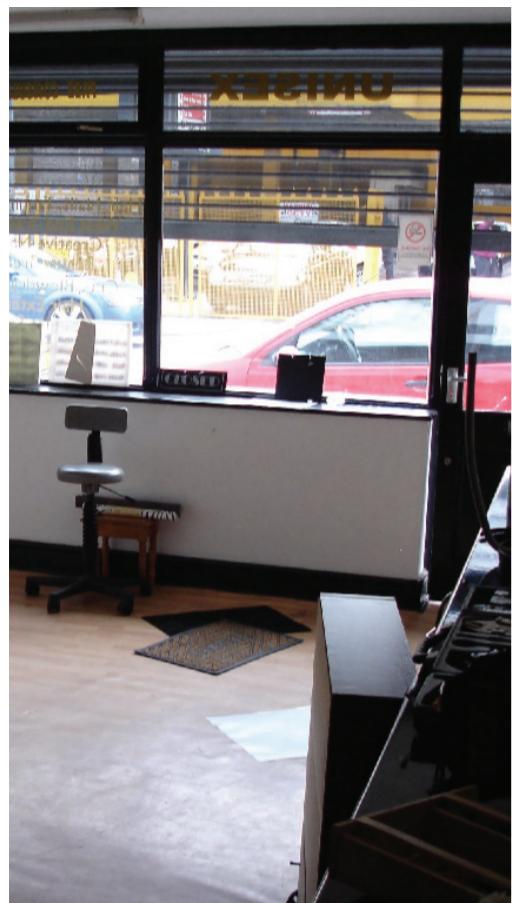
We are supporting the local group Lee Green Lives to develop as an intermediary, and specialist charity Make Believe Arts with the youth-led Level Up group to take on the lease of the first shop that St Modwen have offered. The plan is to engage intensively with both St Modwen and the wider community and aim to take on more shops and open space as the project expands.

In **Southampton**, West Itchen Community Trust is working with a group of traders in Northam Road, a diverse area once considered the hub of Southampton but now suffering with a high level of empties. The ambitious project will build the capacity of the traders group and aims to spark new investment in a local retail economy with 65% vacancies through:

- stimulating new footfall, by introducing a regular street market, encouraging local enterprise and test trading opportunities.
- bringing three redundant units back into use to encourage local enterprise by refurbishing and launching three retail incubators for new business start-ups.
- installing local art and planting displays in and around vacant units to create an attractive and unique shopping environment.

In **Dover**, a 28,000 sq.ft store held by Sainsbury's on a long lease but currently surplus to their requirements, will be converted by Dover Pride into a youth space. Incredibly there is no other youth provision in the town so this meanwhile use will make a major contribution in one of the poorest communities in the country. It is hoped that both

## Meanwhile Projects 2010



Left to right: Tilbury Dock Road, the House of Hastings before and after

the youth provision and the use of surplus supermarkets will become a permanent fixture locally and beyond.

Like Dover, **Tilbury** ranks highly in Indicators of Multiple Deprivation and particularly in low skills levels. The area is facing rapid social change through new housing development, and as a result faces significant race hate crime, low community cohesion and little influence over decisions.

The One Community Development Trust is taking over an empty property at 134 Dock Road as a one-stop shop. Local people will be able to find out about regeneration plans, and the shop will be a base for the Trust's Community Champion programme and sessional use by other agencies including the newly formed Credit Union and Thurrock Local Enterprise Agency. The group is also preparing to launch an environmental enterprise to combat fuel poverty, a community advocacy project, as well as expand the Community Champions initiative. These will all be promoted through the shopfront and will continue beyond the meanwhile use of the building.

In **Newmarket** we have supported the Community Partnership to use a shop that had been closed for 14 months. They opened a training shop to teach retailers how to improve their sales, merchandising, security and marketing skills, ran a competition from the shop for sales

assistants to measure 51 retailing skills, and are setting up a retail network.

Meanwhile Space CIC has been working with Shoreditch Trust to establish the **Hoxton Meanwhile Centre** as a meanwhile training and meeting space. The 8-week plan includes two free to attend sessions including a Kick Start Trial to connect interested partners (projects, landlords, agents, LA, Shoreditch Trust etc) to work on tackling specific local vacant spaces and a session for local authorities and others to present the Intermediary Handbook and understand the benefits and risks of becoming a meanwhile intermediary. The shop has been very successful so far, including hosting the 'Beautiful Daughters' project in honour of the young girl who was shot nearby on the day they moved in.

Following successful partnership projects in **Hastings**, led by Meanwhile Space as an intermediary working closely with the council's Retail Vitality programme, we agreed further support to take on an emblematic building that had inspired the whole Meanwhile policy approach. The **House of Hastings** was a much-loved shop that had become one of the worst eyesores in the town and a symbol of the waste that traditional regeneration cannot touch. At the end of March, after intensive negotiation, Meanwhile Space reached agreement with the owner and the volunteer clean-



Above top: London Stratford Alice Billings House bottom: Bradford 'Westfield Hole' Right: Huddersfield Sheepridge Road

up began. New windows, paid for by the freeholder while Meanwhile Project funds sorted out the electrics and re-clad the outside sign. Launched on 17th May, the building already has a diverse programme of users and activities from arts to environment, including a pop-up architects practice and an impromptu 'skittle alley'!

At the year end we agreed to support the London Borough of Newham to introduce meanwhile uses to Stratford.

From the start the Stratford Town Hall complex, including the recently empty council offices at Alice Billings House, was a strong focus but it was important to explore other options in the context of intensive masterplanning underway for the area. Urban Space Management will be introducing a range of meanwhile approaches throughout their proposals and plans for the meanwhile use of Alice Billings are well advanced.

### From Town Centres to Land and Housing

The Meanwhile Project has already extended from a focus on empty shops in town centres to support the meanwhile use of land for growing and recreation.

Now we have taken a step towards meanwhile housing uses, supporting Fresh Horizons in **Huddersfield** to bring two empty dwellings into meanwhile residential use. As well as the refurbishment aspect, the project includes legal support to develop a Meanwhile Tenancy Agreement that could open up empty homes to help meet housing shortages, and resources for a round-table discussion, bringing together experts and other interested parties from around the country.

The prospect of Purdah drove us mad in the final few weeks of Phase 2. There was so much to do and these extra hurdles felt absurd. However we established a timescale that worked for most projects – with up-front investment used to undertake the intensive development and preparation work for a whole series of meanwhile spaces to open in mid-late May, carrying forward the impetus of meanwhile into the new financial and political era.

We have successfully achieved an investment of £675,000 to support the rapid development of the meanwhile policy approach, despite only receiving the grant agreement for the majority of the funds on 10th March 2010! This level of risk is par for the course and fits with the meanwhile approach – it should be noted that it would be impossible in more straitened times.

# Meanwhile Support

While supporting specific meanwhile use projects across the country, we set out to smooth the way for meanwhilers everywhere through advice, networking and dealing with the technical barriers. The first edition of the Meanwhile Manual went to press in a draft format – very meanwhile...

## LEARNING ON THE SPOT

**Meanwhile Centres** - An opportunity arose in Hastings for a meanwhile centre to be located with other activities in one of the most prominent buildings in the town. Meanwhile Space has retained this approach in Hastings, is now running a Meanwhile Centre in Hoxton and expects to move to Stratford shortly.

**Meanwhile Tour** – a series of week-long live training events run by the Empty Shops Network have been held in Brixton, Shoreham, Carlisle and Coventry. In each place a group of experienced 'meanwhilers' took on an empty property and opened it as a base for meetings about meanwhile, advice to local groups and artists, and a focus for a local exhibition.

**Meanwhile Surveys** - The 'slackspace' survey of Tower Hamlets by local interested people with cameras and maps went ahead and many of the pics were uploaded to the meanwhile ning. This mapping-based approach, which puts local people in control, is growing and could become much more widespread.

**Meanwhile Coalition** - As the 'über-network' for meanwhile, the Meanwhile Project hosted a meeting of 'meanwhile support organisations' in January 2010. These included Meanwhile Space, Spacemakers, Empty Shops Network, Ethical Property Foundation, Federation of City Farms & Gardens, Beekeepers, and Slackspace Colchester. There was positive agreement to work collaboratively as the Meanwhile Coalition, developing activities such as the Meanwhile Tour and the Go and See Grants.

**Empty Shops Handbook** – written and produced in partnership with Dan Thompson of the Empty Shops Network, this stylish booklet offers practical advice and encouragement to meanwhile occupiers.

**Meanwhile Intermediaries Handbook** – Meanwhile Space CIC, our delivery partners in the Meanwhile Project, published the Intermediaries Handbook capturing their experience of acting as an intermediary to support community use of meanwhile assets.

**Go and See Grants** – small grants (total £3,000) are available through the Empty Shops Network to cover expenses for meanwhilers to visit other projects.

## LEGAL AND TECHNICAL

**Meanwhile Lease** – the CLG-sponsored Meanwhile Lease was circulated to stakeholders in autumn 2009, with Meanwhile Project leading on consultation among ground-level interested parties (owners, agents, occupiers, intermediaries) wanting to use it in town centres, while CLG focused on the umbrella bodies (BRC, BPF, ATCM, ABI, etc). The finalised leases included a simple landlord-to-occupier version and a two-part version using an intermediary. Although these model legal instruments are very welcome, there are some clear problems: they do not offer a rolling, 'as long as it lasts' solution; they are called leases rather than licences; the second tier letting is dealt with by a series of sub-leases rather than the participation agreement developed by the cutting-edge Australian project Renew Newcastle. We commissioned Antony Collins to develop the Meanwhile Licence for Land, which is currently with stakeholders for comment and are hoping that this process will lead to new insights about the Meanwhile Lease itself.

**Rates** – we produced a 'Rates Matrix', checked by CLG rates specialists, to simplify the current position around non-domestic rates and clarify our recommendations for local authorities in considering their rate relief strategies.

Business rates remain a thorny issue full of perverse (dis)incentives and technocratic triumph over common sense. Not only does the exemption from empty property rates disincentivise landlords from meanwhile use, but because central government refunds the local authorities 100% of this relief any new meanwhile use that received rate relief would add a 25% burden onto the local authority – they are incentivised to keep it empty!

Moreover, although the primary legislation that governs rate relief specifically prescribes that qualifying organisations and uses must be 'not for profit' it gives no indication as to what that means. Case law has shown that for example, the Guinness Trust was allowed to make profit that was

reinvested into its charitable objectives, and that a zoo was allowed to charge visitors in order to use the profits for the care of the animals and education of the public. We are working towards publishing some guidance that can be corroborated by CLG's Business Rates division.

**Planning/Use Classes** – CLG planning has been involved in the town centres group and has kept us informed about Local Development Orders (LDO). In June 2009 it became easier for local authorities to declare an LDO, without needing it to fit with their Local Development Framework. This should mean it is possible to create permitted development (eg changes of use, temporary signage, etc) to facilitate meanwhile uses within a specific zone such as a town centre. No local authority has yet undertaken a meanwhile-focused LDO.

**Insurance** – Oxygen Insurance have created a meanwhile product which costs £50 per month for any meanwhile unit, payable month-by-month. At present this is only available for those properties in which Meanwhile Space is the intermediary. Almost all projects require public liability insurance and we are seeking to advise on or provide a simpler insurance product than currently available on the market.

## PRESS

An agreement with New Start results in a monthly spread of meanwhile features, and a Q&A section produced by Meanwhile Space. We have arranged with Property Week to run a round-table in June 2010. We are hosting Marcus Westbury from Newcastle NSW, the world leader in empty shops projects, to run UK training and advice.

## LOCAL (examples)

**31 March 2010 - The London Weekly**  
'Local groups to revitalise Leegate shopping centre'

**30 March 2010 - The Telegraph and Argus**  
'Moves to make the mothballed Westfield site attractive wins support from fund'

**20 March 2010 - Scarborough Evening News**  
'Opening windows to a borough revamp'

**26 November 2009 - Rotherham Business News**  
'Meanwhile Rotherham town centre'

## NATIONAL

**14 February 2010 - The Sunday Times**  
'Bringing the theatre to the crowd'

**14 January 2010 - The Daily Telegraph**  
'Short term leases prove to be a boon for traders and customers alike'

**TRADE**  
**07 May 2010 - Property Week**  
'How Meanwhile can be worthwhile'

**06 April 2010 - Clarks Legal**  
'Meanwhile Use Leases'

**30 March 2010 - Social Enterprise Magazine**  
'Recession hit shops reclaimed by communities'

**10 February 2010 - Property Week**  
'Empty shop numbers continue to rise in the UK'

**30 January 2010 - Estates Gazette**  
'Pop-up units revitalise the high street'

**19 January 2010 - Third Sector Magazine**  
'Business Models'

# Promotion

## WEB & NING

**The Meanwhile Ning** was an important early innovation that went from strength to strength (June 45 members, July 98, August 121, October 212, January 355, February 450, March 508, May 569). It tests out the ability of all partners to 'work without walls', difficult when 85% of the public sector blocks social media content for its workers, compared to 15% of the private sector, and virtually none in the third sector.  
[www.meanwhilespace.ning.com](http://www.meanwhilespace.ning.com)

The project's website at [www.meanwhile.org.uk](http://www.meanwhile.org.uk) went live within 3 weeks of the Secretaries of State announcing the policy. A fully redesigned version, incorporating the Meanwhile Showcase, went live on 25th March 2010.

## Meanwhile Projects 2010

### EVENTS

The Meanwhile Project has attended and spoken at a wide range of events throughout the year including:

23 Jun 09	<b>Spacemakers Event Whitechapel</b> Mixed interest group	London	17 Nov 09	<b>Empty Shops Conference</b> Mixed interest group	Carlise
09 Jul 09	<b>Spacemakers Event NESTA</b> Mixed interest group	London	23 Nov 09	<b>Regen WM Conference</b> Mixed interest group	Stoke on Trent
15 Jul 09	<b>Ladywell Residents Group</b> Local residents group	London	30 Nov 09	<b>EMARAN Conference</b> Arts Development Managers	Matlock
21 Jul 09	<b>ATCM East</b> Town Centre Managers	Cambridge	03 Dec 09	<b>Urban Forum Conference</b> Mixed regeneration practitioners	London
08 Sep 09	<b>CLG Meanwhile Lease Roundtable</b> Stakeholder groups	London	17 Dec 09	<b>Peterborough Neighbourhoods</b> and Small Groups Forum Local community groups	P/borough
15 Sep 09	<b>DTA Annual Conference</b> Mixed regeneration practitioners	London	10 Feb 10	<b>Local Data Company</b> Mixed Private Sector	London
18 Sep 09	<b>ATCM South East</b> Town Centre Managers	London	10 Feb 10	<b>Eastern Curve Forum</b> Local residents group	London
24 Sep 09	<b>Spacemakers Event Young Foundation</b> Mixed interest group	London	23 Feb 10	<b>BURA @ 20</b> Mixed regeneration practitioners	London
02 Oct 09	<b>ACES Group Meeting</b> Chief Estates Officers	London	01 Mar 10	<b>Art in Empty spaces</b> Arts council Officers	London
12 Oct 09	<b>High Streets Conference</b> Local Government Officers	London	02 Mar 10	<b>Architecture Foundation Legacy Plus Event</b> Mixed interest group	London
19 Oct 09	<b>Empty Shops Conference</b> Mixed interest group	Worthing	03 Mar 10	<b>Kings Cross Skip Garden</b> Secretary of State visit with stakeholders	London
20 Oct 09	<b>Bradford Regeneration Agency</b> Local Government Officers	Bradford	04 Mar 10	<b>Town centre round-table</b> Sec of State, local authorities, other stakeholders	Darlington
02 Nov 09	<b>Friends of Lee Green</b> Local residents group	London	12 Mar 10	<b>London Parks and Green Spaces Forum</b> Mixed regeneration practitioners	London
10 Nov 09	<b>Spacemakers Workshop Brixton Market</b> Mixed interest group	London	16 Mar 10	<b>Slack Space Event</b> Mixed interest group	Brighton
12 Nov 09	<b>Chain Reaction</b> Mixed interest group	London	23 Mar 10	<b>Bradford Regeneration Agency</b> Local Government Officers	Bradford
16 Nov 09	<b>Craigavon Council Workshop</b> Council Officers	Craigavon	25 Mar 10	<b>Visit to Arthur Green</b> Sec of State, local MP, meanwhilers	Hastings

## Meanwhile Projects 2010

# Meanwhile Process & Lessons Learned

### SUPPORT PROCESSES

It was essential that the Meanwhile Project could be fast, flexible and ferociously on the case. There was no way that a traditional grants round could deliver what we needed in the timescale and with the resources available. Instead we developed a proactive process that began with 'the willing' – people and places that came forward with ideas and energy.

We responded with engaged advice and guidance, usually including a visit to explore project ideas and identify potential blockages. While lots of enquirers were only seeking advice, a high proportion of initial requests for help turned into supported projects. All projects had to do was fill in a Project Overview – a single-page form with space for: WHERE, WHO, WHAT, WHEN (START/DURATION), HOW MUCH, WHAT FOR, CURRENT STATE OF PLAY, CONTINUUM. There's even room for us to log the *type, region, investment, returns, likelihood, impact, timescale, continuity*, our recommendation, along with any conditions of grant support.

In most cases we would be able to respond within a matter of days, although we often went back to projects with advice or requests. In several cases it was our request for a 'letter of reassurance' from a key partner that moved things along.

"Your funding has given us, and therefore the creative and wider community, considerable leverage and enabled us to ensure that the project is qualitatively different from other public realm developments in the city. The practical help on offer has also been useful. Many thanks again for your help and encouragement. I hope that we can go some way to repay this by providing ongoing updates on progress and by sharing the lessons learnt with others who may be facing similar challenges."

Gideon Seymour, Bradford Urban Garden

"Compared to most funders you move so fast and provide so much support and encouragement. It's very refreshing. I just wish the lease would arrive from the landlord as quickly as your grant agreement letter did!"

Trisha Lee, Make Believe Arts

### MANAGEMENT PROCESS

- It was essential that we made decisions quickly, but also that those decisions were scrutinised fairly and effectively. Tracy Axten, DTA board member and Relationship Manager at Triodos Bank, acted as the 'decision-buddy' for Jess Steele as overall project manager.
- All funding decisions were made (or confirmed after further phone/email exchange) on our virtual meeting platform, Elluminate, and recordings taken that remain available through our ongoing licence.

- The relationship with our delivery partner, Meanwhile Space CIC, has been both critical to the success of the project and reassuringly strong. The directors, Eddie Bridgeman and Emily Miller, supported by Jessica Courtney Bennett and Lucia Caistor-Arendar, have nurtured and negotiated an impressive portfolio of projects as well as developing business ideas for the future of the CIC.

### LESSONS LEARNED

To achieve a diverse showcase of meanwhile projects at great speed, the central project team had to move fast and be genuinely engaged in project development. DTA has always argued for engaged investment approaches that deliver financial aid in a broader supportive context and with a real-time approach to risk. Many funders put projects through impossible hoops, take longer in decision-making than they allow in development time, set rules for their own benefit rather than to maximise impact, and end up giving too much money at the wrong time tied up in complex rules, increasing rather than mitigating the risk. To do things properly meant valuing the hard work that project leaders contribute, making the right decisions quickly, providing

## Meanwhile Projects 2010

appropriate levels of cash at the right time, and making sure that the projects feel we're all on the same side – the side of getting good things happening in otherwise dead spaces. We are proud that we made £500,000 go such a long way in such a short time, and we will continue to support and showcase the great projects that have emerged. If there's one thing we've learned it's that in the end it's all about the people. Meanwhile requires energy and initiative, people who are great at making things happen.

There is a whole range of hurdles that need to be brought down by central by central and local government. There

needs to be a better understanding of 'not-for-profit' which does not mean, as one local authority rating department seems to think, that 'no cash must change hands on the premises'. At present there are significant disincentives built into national rate relief policies. The best answer would be a meanwhile exemption from business rates; in the interim clearer guidance on existing powers would help. The same is true in planning, licensing and insurance.

The concept of 'meanwhile' resonates with the times. Nothing is certain, money is tight, waste is anathema. Communities can deliver change on the ground; they just need the go-ahead...

# Barriers & Opportunities

## BARRIERS

**Access to landlords** – before they can be approached with a proposal they must be identified; lack of information regarding ownership, some agents unwilling to open negotiations.

**Business rate relief** – unless a charity acts as an intermediary there is lack of leverage to persuade councils to grant rate relief for non-profitable organisations. Meanwhile activity proposed as an exempt classification.

**Bureaucracy** – there are too many separate departments in local authorities that must be won over to fulfil the goal of meanwhile being fast and inspiring. Teams from planning, licensing and rates are often at loggerheads with goals that regeneration, arts/culture or economic development teams want to realise.

**Change of Use** – do you or don't you need a change of use; can you trade out of the space? The restrictions that apply to permanent uses do so to interim uses of more than 28 days, which in the fast-paced world of Meanwhile can jeopardise projects getting off the ground.

**Legal delays** – local solicitors make their living out of nervous owners. Property lawyers are used to moving at a leisurely pace, especially where there are multiple layers of ownership. "It's with the solicitors" is enough to put fear into the heart of anyone trying to get hold of empty premises.

**Grant dependent culture** – voluntary organisations are used to waiting for funding to meet all their costs and unfamiliar with the make-do/make-it-happen approach common to both old-fashioned community work and entrepreneurial risk-taking. Meanwhile means taking the initiative and doing it right now with whatever is available.

## OPPORTUNITIES

**Access to space** – for projects not yielding sufficient surplus to pay commercial rent and rates, can lead to more diversity on the high street and over time add interest to the high street space.

**Create a better environment** – using empty spaces, be it whole buildings, shops, or land reduces blight such as antisocial behaviour, gets places cleaned up and active and more attractive for long term reuse.

**Stimulates a sense of place** – by introducing activity that benefits the community, a different type of footfall is created and new activities emerge, creating character and a destination.

**Avoiding waste** – new functions are able to use spaces that are no longer fit for the original purpose, attracting different users and experimenting with ideas. As space remains at a premium, especially in urban areas, meanwhile use reduces the costs associated with a vacant asset.

**Achieving direct outcomes** – social enterprises, new ventures, employment and enterprise activities or community and social projects can use empty spaces for specific projects that struggle to find space because of their temporary nature or lack of set-up finance.

**Experimentation** – empty spaces can be used as opportunities to experiment and test ideas that might make a long-term contribution.

**Civic pride** – empty spaces can be used as civic salons for the informal exchange of local knowledge, to share ideas about their community, their high street, their schools or what businesses may or may not work on their doorstep.

## Meanwhile Projects 2010

# Project List

PLACE	MEANWHILER	PROJECT
Bradford	FABRIC	Centenary Square
Bradford	FABRIC	Bradford Urban Garden
Cambridge	Cambridge City Council	Changing Spaces
Cambridge	Citylife	Beginspace
Carlisle & Penrith	Eden Arts/Arcade Arts	Arcade Arts
Dover	Dover Pride	Sainsburys building
Hastings	Meanwhile Space	Nomad (Old Halifax building)
Hastings	Hastings Pier & White Rock Trust	Arthur Green
Hastings	Meanwhile Space	House of Hastings
Huddersfield	Fresh Horizons	Meanwhile homes pilot
Leeds, Seacroft	Leeds 14 Trust	Digital lounge
London, Acton	Action Acton	Former post office
London, Camden	People's Supermarket	People's Supermarket
London, Hackney	Meanwhile Space	253 Hoxton Street
London, Lewisham	Make Believe Arts	Leegate shopping centre
London, Newham	LB Newham/Urban Space Mgmt	Stratford Town Hall
Margate	Margate Renewal Partnership	HK Design (old casino)
Margate	Margate Renewal Partnership	Windows of Opportunity
Margate	Margate Renewal Partnership	Former Marks & Spencer
Newmarket	Retail Revival	Retail Revival
Scarborough	Scarborough Borough Council	Windows to the Borough
Scarborough	Scarborough Borough Council	Maritime Heritage centre
Southampton	West Itchen Community Trust	Northam Road
Tilbury	One Community Development Trust	Dock Road
<b>OTHER MEANWHILE PROJECT ACTIVITY</b>		
Analysis of extent & impact	SQW	
Go & See Grants / Meanwhile Tours	Empty Shops Network	
Meanwhile Lease	Denton Wilde Sapte (commissioned by CLG)	
Meanwhile Licence for Land	Antony Collins Solicitors	



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Meanwhile use is “a viable and intelligent option” with benefits for private owners, community groups and the wider public.

The Meanwhile Project has been spreading the word and learning on the go, jumping over, slicing through and tearing down hurdles from Hastings to Huddersfield, Cambridge to Cumbria, Scarborough to Southampton.

This report describes progress in the fast lane of the fight to bring wasted resources into productive use for the benefit of local communities.

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*ArtAttack poetry on the stalled Westfield site in central Bradford, now being reinvented as the Bradford Urban Garden*

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I do not mean to damage or deface  
these are mere words (no crime in that), a plea  
that not to share out wealth is a disgrace  
so who is the offender - you or me?

For sticks and stones  
may break our bones  
when police and planners throw them,  
but words still name  
another's shame  
although the law will clear them.