



Green Town - Newcastle Common Call For Artists 2022

## **Our Provocation**

Newcastle Common is a three year programme, exploring the future of Newcastle town centre by using empty shops. The activation of empty shops and the spaces between them brings a range of economic and social benefits: but it can also deliver positive environmental impacts.

As we rethink the use of our town centres, and after a couple of years in which the importance of gardens and outdoor spaces has become evident, and in light of the climate crisis, we are looking for people who are interested in the point where these subjects come together.

We're looking for artists, makers, performers, designers, architects, and writers making work that can interest, engage, delight, frustrate, and provoke our audiences. We'll create an exhibition and programme, open for one month, that lets the audience respond to the work in different ways. We're interested in things that can bring the same people back into the shop more than once during that time.

We're interested in what happens in the shops in town centres - how they can be spaces for learning, sharing, and making as well as just selling things.

Short term, pop up use can get attention for a cause. 'Just by EJF' was a pop up on Carnaby Street that launched the Environmental Justice Foundation's Vivienne Westwood T-shirt. And Camden Friends of the Earth held a pop up with a focus on vintage & upcycled fashion from local ethical traders, and it included upcycling workshops. So our shop might become the space for activism.

More long-term projects with environmental benefits include maker spaces and repair workshops. The Men's Sheds movement create community spaces for men to connect, converse and create. They provide positive mental health impacts for participants. But many also focus on repair and reuse. It's also worth noting: charity shops are essentially about reuse, so also deliver an environmental benefit. Our shop could be a space for repair, reuse, or exchange.

And FARM:shop London pioneered growing inside an empty shop, using aquaponics, hydroponics, and vermiculture. Our shop might be a space for nurture, planting, and growing or for teaching skills around gardening.

That outdoors, the space between shops is really important, too, so we're interested in how our shops connect to the outdoors.

Post-World War 2, Fred Cleary identified the benefits of trees, planting, and small gardens to the City of London. Sir Richard Rogers has made the case for greener cities, and demonstrated the important relationship between buildings and the spaces around them. In 'Making People-friendly Towns' Francis Tibbalds made the case for human-scale development and a higher-quality public realm. The idea that we should green our town centres is not new and the evidence is clear.

People will travel a greater distance to visit a greener town centre, and will spend more time there once they arrive. Shoppers will pay more for parking, and then spend 9 to 12% more in a town centre with trees.

Well placed trees provide shade for customers in hot weather. Trees and shrubs can also act as a windbreak in bad weather. Both of these impacts bring obvious benefits for users of the town centre: they also bring direct economic benefits to the owners of shops or workspaces, by reducing heating or cooling costs.

Trees also reduce mental fatigue; people work better and take less time off if they can see trees, hospital patients have better recovery times if they can see trees, and green areas reduce mental fatigue.

And finally, we're interested in the benefit of keeping buildings rather than demolishing them.

New buildings have been seen as the sign of progress and as a positive for town centres. However, building and construction are responsible for 39 per cent of all carbon emissions in the world. Construction uses around 40% of the world's extracted materials. Waste from demolition and construction represents the largest single waste stream in many countries.

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) has recently launched a Retrofit First campaign, championing the reuse of buildings, and their 2021 awards included a number of refurbished buildings. The Greater London Authority has set out new design principles for projects that prioritise retention and refurbishment. The Pritzker prize in 2021 was awarded to Lacaton & Vassal, whose manifesto says: 'Never demolish, never remove – always add, transform and reuse'

Refurbishing an existing building is quicker than demolition and a new build, and has a lower level of risk. New builds typically take five years, by which time uses such as retail, workplace practices, and technology will all have changed.

So - reusing old buildings is a massive environmental benefit for councils looking to address their carbon footprint. And temporary reuse can be a tool to identify future new uses, such as workspaces, and to test wider patterns, for example by changing footfall, which can help build a case for or against change of use. Can our shops contribute to that debate - especially at a time when our areas are seeing widespread regeneration?