Bedford Borough
Empty Shops Information Pack
Numbers of empty shops are on the rise throughout the UK. In Bedford we recognise that these empty shops require fresh ideas and provide an opportunity for people to try something new. We are committed to helping where we can and have developed an Empty Shops Strategy to help us to help you.

This pack has been designed as part of that strategy to give you a starting point for investigating the permanent or temporary uses of empty commercial spaces. You might be an individual with an innovative idea, an art group looking for space or a community group looking to revitalize your local area. You might be an entrepreneur looking to test a business idea or perhaps you already run a business and are looking for a new way to access customers. Whatever your background or goal, empty shops open up a number of possibilities.

If you are a landlord and are considering ways to fill your properties in Bedford then section 6 is designed for you.

This pack is designed for people who may have an idea for an empty shop but don’t know where to start. It summarises what help you can expect from the Council, provides some case studies for inspiration, tips for making your idea a reality and suggests a number of things that you must consider. It also signposts you to local and national contacts and provides a reading list so that you can find out more before embarking on your empty shop adventure.
2. Using Empty Shops

Long Term Use
The existing retail model of a long-term lease or ownership is prominent in Bedford and we are keen to encourage longer term businesses to stay and prosper here. There is a wealth of support that exists for you if you are looking into taking on a shop of your own, or are investigating other long term uses of retail space.

If you are looking for a commercial home for your shop, restaurant or office, we advise you to look on our website www.investinbedford.com where you can search by location, type and size of unit to see what’s available. You can also talk to our Economic Development Team for advice on what’s on the market (see section 7 for their contact details). When you have found a potential property, you will need to contact the agent for that property to discuss details and arrange a viewing.

When budgeting, please be aware that you will need to take into consideration the rent, business rates, BID levy (if you are within the Business Improvement District area), utilities, insurance and whatever fixtures and fittings you require as well as stock and staffing costs.

If you need support to develop your business idea we encourage you to talk to experts to make sure you can build a successful and sustainable business. We have listed various sources of help at the end of this pack for you to choose from depending on whether you are looking to set up a business, social enterprise or charity.

Temporary or ‘Pop-Up’ Use
Increasingly people are using empty shops for temporary or ‘pop up’ uses. These ‘pop-up shops’ may take a variety of forms, for example: an existing business may extend their offering into a new space for a limited time; a community or arts group may create a gallery or installation for a day or two; an entrepreneur may use a shop on a temporary basis to test a new idea, a group may use the window space or vinyl to advertise a service, project or product.

The ‘Pop-Up’ model offers a range of benefits including:
- Providing an opportunity to test or prototype a new business model;
- Allowing market research of a new product, range or service;
- Giving a product or service an attention-grabbing launch or increase its profile;
- Reinforcing an existing brand and customer’s loyalty to it;
- Allowing new ideas to be tested with limited risk;
- Providing an accessible way for organisations to engage with the public.
Temporary use of empty shops can be quite complex as no two pop up shops are the same! Bedford Borough Council recognises the benefit in temporary uses for retail units and the assistance they can offer is outlined in section 4 below.

In many respects, the challenges that a temporary shop-keeper faces are similar to those faced by a regular shop-keeper. You need to find a suitable unit, negotiate rent, work out your budget, investigate rates, licenses and levies as well as work out your offering. This pack should help you cover all the things you need to think about as well as signpost you to the help that is available. Your town centre needs fresh ideas, so let’s work together to make it happen. In the next section, we offer some innovative ideas for permanent and temporary uses of empty shops to get you thinking.

3. Getting Inspired - Case Studies

This section shows how others have used empty properties for both permanent and temporary shop use.

Permanent Uses: The Kiln, High Street, Bedford

Owner Sue Vines bought The Kiln (a pottery painting business) from its previous owners when the shop was still located in Ram Yard. As her business grew she moved premises to the High Street and made the decision to expand the café side of the operation creating a multi-purpose business.

Alongside the pottery painting studio, The Kiln’s café stocks locally made cakes and serves tea in hand-painted crockery. This multi-purpose use broadens The Kiln’s appeal to those who want to paint pottery and those who simply want to have tea and cake in a creative environment.
In 2012, Bedford Creative Arts worked with Kristian Purcell to create a ‘Shop Studio’. They transformed an empty shop in Church Arcade, Bedford, into an artist’s studio, exposing the town to the artist’s normally private creative practice. Saturday and Sunday passed busily with Kristian completing several self-portraits amidst the public passing by and popping in to chat with the artist about his work.

Local shop-keepers reported an increase in footfall and seeing lots of new faces in the arcade and Bedford Creative Arts were able to distribute marketing material relating to their programme of activities. Visit www.bedfordcreativearts.org.uk for further information.

Temporary Uses: Shop Studio, Bedford Creative Arts & Kristian Purcell

Community group ‘We are Bedford’ undertook a range of empty shop projects during 2011 and 2012 including empty shop festival The Castle Quay Weekender, pop up galleries, a big draw activity, a record shop, comic book exhibition and a variety of art installations. Their longest running project was an example of social selling. The Pop Up Emporium opened for six weeks and stocked a range of goods made or designed in Bedford by 22 different makers and designers.

The makers and a team of volunteers staffed the emporium and undertook business workshops led by local experts. All vendors were offered funded places on Wenta business courses to help them continue to grow their businesses.

Visit www.wearebedford.co.uk for case studies on all their empty shop projects.

Temporary Uses: We Are Bedford
Further afield Hubshop Rotterdam offers another example of social selling. They refer to themselves as a collaborative boutique, catering to designers, artisans, inventors and food makers from Holland & beyond. Hubshop is a retail platform for innovative products that are sustainable, handmade or forward thinking.

Hubshop presents a shop-in-shop umbrella approach; whereby they rent out boxes of various sizes to different designers & entrepreneurs on a monthly basis.

Creative learning agency Ignite! opened a 4 week Pop Up Science Shop in Broadmarsh Shopping Centre, Nottingham in 2012 called 3-2-1-Ignition*. They used empty retail space in the heart of Nottingham’s city centre to bring it alive with a whole host of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths activities.

Through this project they brought science to the high street and tested the idea of an alternative kind of classroom. The shop was open to the public and schools were invited to visit with students. They offered creative activities, workshops and ‘science busking’ to their visitors. They attracted over 3300 visitors to their shop over the four weeks they were open.
4. How Bedford Borough Council can help

Bedford Borough Council has developed an Empty Shop Strategy which outlines our commitment to helping fill the empty shops in our town centre. We see empty properties as an opportunity to revive our town centre as a thriving social and retail hub and as a venue for community and creative uses.

We want to nurture both temporary and permanent ideas for the town centre and we can help in a variety of ways.

If you have an idea for an empty shop project, either temporary or permanent we promise to:
• Help you access the relevant departments within the Council;
• Pass on your requests for an empty property to our Landlords and Agents network;
• Provide advice on the rates and BID levy for your empty shop;
• Put you in contact with previous empty shop keepers;
• Provide information on empty shops currently being marketed.

Unfortunately, we can’t
• Negotiate with landlords on your behalf;
• Cover your costs;
• Cover insurance;
• Undertake risk assessments.

However, we do offer further contacts to resources and organisations that may be able to help and we have listed them in section 7.

As part of our promise to working with people to make the most of the empty shop space in the town, we have made a commitment to offer one point of contact within the Council for temporary empty shop projects. If you have an idea for an empty shop, we recommend that you think about the areas and issues outlined in the following sections before contacting the Council.
### 5. Making it Happen...

**Refining your idea**
Developing your idea is a first step for any business or project. The better you are able to communicate your idea the better you will be able to plan productively and communicate it to others. Research what other people have done by looking at local, national and international examples. Think carefully about your business case (even if it isn’t a business). Do some market research.

- What need does your project or business meet in this town?
- What is your business model and have you undertaken a business plan?
- Who will your customers or clients be?
- Is there an appetite for your idea? How do you know?
- Does anything similar exist locally? Will they be competition or potential collaborators?
- Which experts can help you develop your idea?
- How will you fund it initially?

### Building a project team
Whatever your project it is likely that you will need help, but this is particularly the case if you are thinking about running a project voluntarily.

Reach out to others who can help, both individuals, experts and existing organisations.

Thinking about your legal structure is an important step that lays the foundations for the development of your project.

- What help do you need?
- Can you commit the time and energy?
- Who shares your goals?
- Are there organisations who can partner with you?
- What is your legal structure (eg. business/ community group/ social enterprise)?
Finding an empty shop

There are established services to help you find the right space for your project. Estate agencies and the Economic Development Team can help. It will still help to consider the questions below however, before you contact them. For temporary projects you may have to think more creatively as you will need to negotiate an agreement that suits both your needs and the landlords.

Prepare to be as flexible as possible if you are asking for a low or no rent agreement. Think about the following questions before you try to track down landlords or approach commercial agencies and be as clear as possible about your idea so they can decide how best to help. If you decide to approach landlords directly then you will need to find them. The Council have some contacts with landlords and will pass on any requests, but you may also benefit from doing your own detective work.

Use your own networks and ask other shop keepers if they know who owns which units.

• What kind of space do you need? What size? What location?
• Do you have anyone within your personal network with links to landlords?
• Which commercial agencies have track records of working on projects like yours?

Legal/licenses

In all cases there will be a number of legal considerations to consider. When looking for retail units, you will notice that different units are listed as having different ‘classes’ for use. This simply means that different buildings have been deemed suitable for different uses. Class A1 is a standard retail shop for example whereas A3 is a restaurant or café. It is important to take note of this when looking for a property as any changes to use class would need to be applied for and are not guaranteed. Other changes you need to make to the shop such as signage and internal alterations (especially if you are in a listed building) are also likely to require consent from the Council before any development starts. If you are in any doubt whether you need consent then it is always best to check.

Some activities also require a license as they fall under the Licensing Act 2003. These activities include selling hot food or drink between 11pm and 5am, offering regulated entertainment or selling alcohol and would require a Premises License or a Temporary Event Notice (which would only be suitable if you want to offer these services in the short term). If you think you may need a license you should contact our Licensing team for help and advice.

• What activities will you be doing in your shop?
• Which ‘class use’ would you need your empty shop to have?
• Do you plan to sell food or drink?
Meanwhile (Temporary) Leases
You will be required to sign an agreement or lease, which sets out the parameters of the agreement between you and your landlord.

There are existing government initiatives to make it easier for landlords and pop up shopkeepers to work together for their mutual benefit. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has developed the Meanwhile Project (www.meanwhile.org.uk) which provides a range of tools, resources and advice including model leases to cover temporary uses.

Meanwhile Leases are for use by non-commercial occupiers, so are ideal for voluntary or charitable groups, artists and musicians who will contribute to town centre vitality but who would otherwise be unable to afford normal commercial rents.’

Given the short-term nature of potential Meanwhile Leases, in some cases it may not be appropriate for the landlord to require payment, although other costs (rates, BID levy, utility bills and insurance) should not be overlooked.

For more information visit https://www.gov.uk/meanwhile-use-lease-and-guidance-notes-for-landlords

Finding the resources
There are a number of financial overheads to consider when taking on an empty shop project. Insurance, business rates, the BID levy (if applicable), licenses, utilities, stock and staffing. If you are in the Business Improvement District area, you will be required to pay 2% extra business rates for the services provided. You will need to research the commercial charges applicable to businesses, charitable organisations and community groups for the provision of electricity, gas, water and IT services.

If you are undertaking an art or community project there may be some help available and all contacts are listed in section 7. A more sustainable approach may be to design a business model that makes your project pay its own way. Whether you are a business, social enterprise or charity, think about what services and products you could offer and to whom.

• Have you agreed a budget?
• What funding do you require?
• How will you access funding?
• What resources do you already have?
• What can you borrow?
Waste/recycling
You will be responsible for ensuring all waste and rubbish is disposed of correctly. For short-term use this could be as simple as providing bins and recycling bags or for longer term use you will need to arrange commercial waste collections. Contact Bedford Borough Council who can assess your needs and suggest the best solution. Remember – what goes into a shop has to come out.

• What waste will your project generate?
• What is the storage situation at the shop? Do you have space for outside bins?
• If you are looking at a temporary shop, what ways could you dispose of your waste?

Health & safety
Any employees, volunteers or members of the public who enter your premises become your responsibility; therefore you must take reasonable steps to ensure their safety. If you have staff and/or volunteers and are inviting members of the public into your shop, you will require Employee and Public Liability Insurance for the term of your tenancy. Conduct a risk assessment and ensure that everyone is aware of potential hazards, where fire exits are and what to do in an emergency. Think about the accessibility of your shop.

In all cases be mindful of trip hazards and organize the space to ensure that it is easy to navigate around for people of all abilities.

• Who will you need to cover with your insurance policy and what activities will they be undertaking?
• What stock, fixtures and fittings do you need to insure?
• Who is insuring the building?
• Who will take responsibility for undertaking a risk assessment?
• How accessible is your shop? Can you do anything to improve the accessibility?
• What would happen in the case of a fire?

Making it happen
For great ideas to happen then a robust plan of action needs to be put in place. A time plan can help (with some flexibility built in of course) and should be built into your business or project plan. Gathering support for your venture can be done through communicating your idea and progress through networking, social media and the press. The support of others can keep you going as you make your project a reality.

• When do you want your shop to open?
• Who can you tell about your progress?
• Who can help you create a plan of action, and help you stick to it?
• What first steps can you take, today?
6. For Landlords

If you are a landlord with commercial space in Bedford and are looking at innovative ways to attract tenants then we are able to help in a number of ways. We are committed to proactively promoting everything that Bedford has to offer in order to promote it as a destination for shoppers, visitors and businesses alike.

Temporary and Pop Up Uses
You may be considering allowing your properties for ‘Pop Up’ and short term lets. For examples of what this might entail, please refer to section 2 and 3 of this pack.

These arrangements are becoming more common and there are a number of benefits for landlords:

• Temporary tenants increase footfall which may help secure longer term tenants and stop the unit from looking uninviting;
• Pop Up projects increase interest in an area and can generate positive PR for you and your properties;
• Each new temporary tenant/pop up project will attract unique visitors to your property, therefore raising awareness over longer periods;
• For tenancies over six weeks in duration you qualify for a three month business rate exemption period;
• Provides opportunities to test out business ideas that can go on to require long term tenancies. Legal and licensing considerations still need to be in place and we have included advice on these areas in this pack (e.g. www.meanwhile.org.uk)

Business Support
- The Council’s Economic Development team can offer advice and signpost you to potential grant funding pots;
- We are able to give insight into the kind of properties that are most sought after which may help you to decide whether making changes to your properties would make them more attractive to tenants;
- We can introduce you to groups or individuals who might be interested in temporary use (see Temporary & Pop Up Uses).

Networks and Collaboration
- We are committed to strengthening the links between the Council, agents and landlords in order for us to work collaboratively to make Bedford town centre an attractive prospect for businesses;
- You are invited to join the new bi-annual Landlords’ Forum in order to share information and work collaboratively to fill your properties;
- We will share our research and information with you and are committed to working with you to pass on any enquiries from tenants that are relevant to your properties.
7. Find out more...

Local Contacts:

Bedford Borough Council:
• Economic Development (Empty Shops) - 01234 276257 / sian.hughes@bedford.gov.uk
• Economic Development (Property Availability) - 01234 276235 / getintouch@investinbedford.com
• Business Rates - 01234 718097 / localtax@bedford.gov.uk
• Licensing - 01234 276934 / licensing@bedford.gov.uk
• Food Hygiene & Standards - 01234 267422
• Health & Safety (Commercial) - 01234 267422
• Trading Standards - 01234 267422
• Business Waste Disposal - 01234 718011
• Disability, Equality & Access - 01234 718565

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Bedford Creative Arts (local art commissions) - 01234 818670 / info@bedfordcreativearts.org.uk

Other:
• Bedford BID - 01234 404500 / info@lovebedford.co.uk
• Bedford Volunteer Centre - 01234 213100 / vb@bedfordvb.org.uk

Reading List:
• Pop Up Business for Dummies www.emptyshops.wordpress.com/2012/10/03/pop-up-business-for-dummies-2
• Bedford Borough Empty Shop Strategy - www.bedford.gov.uk/emptyshopsstrategy

National Contacts:
• The Empty Shop Network (case studies, guidance & downloads) - dan@artistsandmakers.com
• Meanwhile Space (empty shop projects, guidance & downloads) - info@meanwhilespace.com
• Social Enterprise East of England - 0845 606 6296 / admin@seee.co.uk
• Princes Trust - 01438 730 520 / webinfoea@princes-trust.org.uk

Useful Websites:
• Bedford Borough Council www.bedford.gov.uk
• Commercial Property Search www.investinbedford.com
• Bedford BID www.lovebedford.co.uk
• We Are Bedford www.facebook.com
• Empty Shops Network www.emptyshops.wordpress.com
• Meanwhile Space www.meanwhilespace.com
• Arts Council - Grants for the Arts www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/apply-for-funding
• Big Lottery Fund www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/england
• Wenta - Business Planning & Training Courses www.wenta.co.uk/starting-a-business
• Business Link – Business Start up Advice www.gov.uk/starting-up-a-business