

# IMPACT REVIEW OF A PRE-FEASIBILITY STUDY

## THE BRIEF

- Assess current capability/capacity to undertake a capital project;
- Support staff and directors to better understand the main characteristics, sequence of events, and potential risks involved in undertaking a capital project;
- Develop a road map/high level action plan setting out the next steps towards CLAY acquiring its own building. The current 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has imposed a rapidly changing set of lockdown rules, with further changes and adaptations likely. The current study, its conclusions/action plan will therefore need to remain under constant review by CLAY staff and trustees as circumstances change.

## CONTEXT

This report was commissioned by Centre for Live Art Yorkshire (CLAY), funded through Arts Council England's COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund, with additional support from East Street Arts 'Guild' programme. The study took place at a significant point of time for CLAY which is in process of setting up a new legal entity, reflecting the final stage of transition from Live Art Bistro (LAB/company limited by shares) to Centre for Live Art Yorkshire (CLAY/company limited by guarantee). The company is also part-way through a 3-year lease on its current premises – a former car showroom on Regent Street, Leeds – a prime development area undergoing rapid change. With a 3 month break clause in the lease, there is an ongoing risk that the organisation could find itself homeless at relatively short notice, if and when the landlord finds a suitable buyer.

# SCOPE OF THE WORK

The following activities were undertaken between August and October 2020:

## **Preparation**

A desk-based familiarisation exercise to understand CLAY as an organisation, in terms of legal structure, governance, staffing capacity, finances, cashflow, business plan and programme.

A site visit and preparatory meeting was undertaken on 3 Sept.

## **Stakeholder interviews/perceptions analysis**

5 key stakeholders were interviewed who were able to offer insights into CLAY from local, regional and national perspectives. In telephone/video call interviews, lasting 45-60 minutes, stakeholders were invited to reflect on the following questions:

- Quality & significance of CLAY's artistic programme
- Strengths and weaknesses of their current business model (competencies & capacity)
- Strategic fit – local/regional/national. (Now & in future) • Impact if and/or when CLAY lose their current premises
- Anything else interviewees want to add. Interviews were undertaken in confidence. Comments have been anonymised and common themes incorporated into the company 'health check'.

## **Workshop 1: Options appraisal**

An Participatory planning workshop was held at CLAY on 17 September, attended by Jessica Sweet (Director), Fern George (Development Manager), Marie Koehl (Company Co-ordinator) and Gillian Dyson (CLAY company director).

Issues addressed were:

- What are the risks and benefits of undertaking a capital project?
- What is the 'minimum specification' for CLAY's future building requirements? (Essential, Desirable, Ideal.)
- What are the options for finding new premises? (Purchase, commercial lease, asset transfer, etc.) The Options Appraisals and Building Specification have been set out in the appendices. Additional support: An outcome from workshop 1 and the wider project research, a number of areas were identified where CLAY might benefit from additional support and a longer-term approach to planning. Templates for cost centre budgeting and project planning tools (in Gantt chart form) and induction/support was provided to enable CLAY to explore/take forward between workshops (and beyond the current consultancy period).

## **Workshop 2: Timetable/action planning.**

A second workshop, with same participants, was held online due to increased COVID-19 restrictions. It explored:

- The typical (iterative) development cycle for a capital/relocation project including site acquisition, fundraising, design development, costs.
- The lessons learned from the internal cost centre budget exercise.
- The common themes emerging from the background research and stakeholder interviews.
- The specific implications and challenges for CLAY.
- Conclusions and action planning to take the project forward in the short/medium term.

## **Conclusions and actions**

A report was made analysing and summarising the findings from each of the elements above, offering summary conclusions and recommended actions.

**Yvonne Deane, Deane Associates**

# IMPACT

The impact from this experience was invaluable and that we got a lot out of it:

- We now know and understand the options that are available to us and when we find a suitable site we'll be in a position to conduct a feasibility study with confidence and competence.
- The stakeholder interviews were conducted in confidence but hearing the anonymised feedback was extremely useful. A lot of what the stakeholders were detailing went towards supporting our decision to find stability in a space or building. And also led us to some new findings about the inconsistencies in our comms.
- The most valuable thing we gained from the experience was the relationship with Yvonne, the consultant, who is extremely well positioned to support us in the next steps and is well connected in the city to refer us onto more supporters to further our aims. This has led to us using the mentoring budget available to us through Guild to leverage funding to work with her in the future.
- Lastly this study has helped form the basis of our business plan. Using many of the tools and helpful templates that Yvonne imparted on to us so we feel confident to create an accurate picture of what the next 4 years will look like for CLAY.

This process really helped us understand the position we hold in the city and what as a physical space we really need to provide. The markers we see as success were largely qualitative and therefore subject to interpretation which was useful in allowing us to fit the study to the needs of a small business.

**Jessica Sweet, Artistic Director, CLAY**