

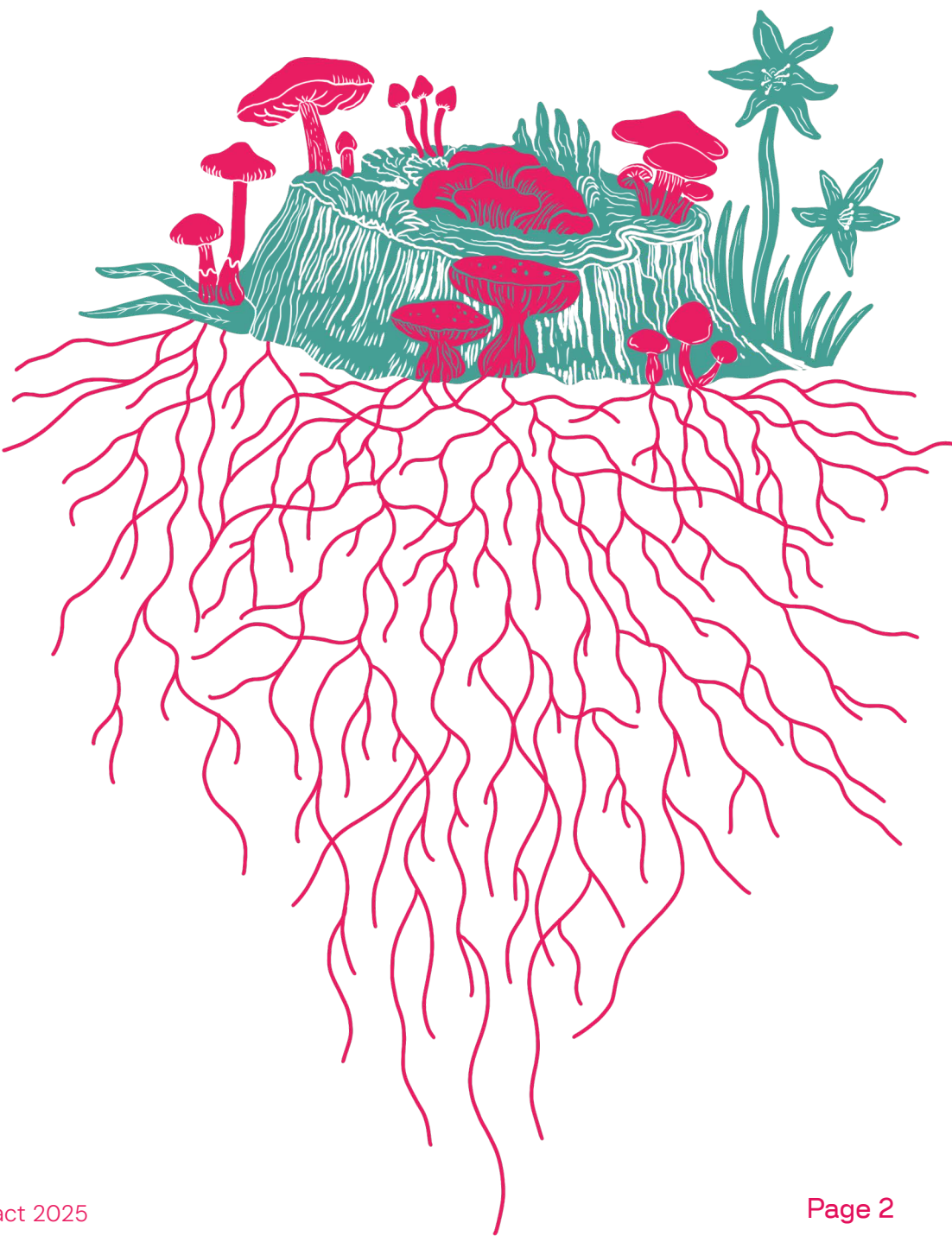


Artspace UK Impact Report 2025

ARTSPACE
LIFESPACE

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WELCOME

From our Co-Chair–Aran Dasan

In 2026 we mark two HUGE milestones: 20 years of Artspace Lifespace in Bristol, and 10 years since we became a charity. It is a moment to look back with pride at our roots, and then look forwards and upwards with ambition and hope to where we go next.

It has also been a year of change on our Board. We said goodbye to Clarissa Jeakings, our Treasurer since 2021, and to Peri Stefanou and Richard Irvine, all of whom gave generously of their time and expertise. Heartfelt thanks to them all. I was delighted to have joined the Board this year and alongside Ben Stephenson, we have been co-chairing the Board since April 2026. We are no longer the newbies with Rhiannon Jones recently joining the board.

Across every venue, our staff, artists, traders and volunteers have shown the same resilience and creativity that has defined Artspace Lifespace since Doug Francis and Wim Penhaul first began this work. This report is a celebration of our community, and a clear-eyed look at what it will take to secure the next 20 years of Artspace Lifespace.

Aran Dasan, Chair of the Board of Trustees





WELCOME

Twenty years ago, Artspace Lifespace began with the simple need to find unique spaces to put on crazy shows and the belief that empty, neglected buildings could become the beating heart of Bristol's creative life. Twenty years on and sixteen buildings later, that belief has been proven and we have shown that creative uses bring energy to high streets.

At the end of 2025 we welcomed over half a million visits across all of our venues, supported 150 artists with studio space at The Island, Sparks and Arts Mansion, and were named one of just five Community-Led High Street Innovators in the country by Power to Change. We also made the difficult decision to close The Vestibules after eight years, a reminder that the meanwhile model we operate within always carries risk alongside opportunity. We have also been joined by fantastic new trustees, each bringing new energy and perspective as we plan for our next decade.

As we look to our next chapter, our priorities are clear: secure long-term investment in The Island, keep seeking for our long-term home and sharing what we've learned, so other organisations can do this work too. We will keep making the case, that affordable creative space and community-led high streets are not just nice-to-have, they are essential civic infrastructure.

Kathryn Chiswell Jones, Chief Executive Officer



Who We Are

Our Mission: Turning vacant buildings into creative communities

We take on a range of vacant buildings – from shops, offices and warehouses to civic and heritage buildings – and turn them into spaces for art, imagination, ideas and community.

We say yes to the mad idea, the risky show, the artist nobody else will back. It means creatives get to make the work they want, not just the work a funder will pay for.

We hire out affordable event spaces and studios to bring in income, which pays for our residency programmes and enables creative experiments.

Artspace UK's commitment to **grassroots creativity** helps rebuild civic life through playful places.





Grassroots and giving

We back DIY and community-led culture. Some of the best work happens in the margins, informally, without waiting for permission. Sharing our spaces through our residency programme embodies this value.



Rooted in place

We leave places better than we found them, for the long term, not just for a project cycle. We're part of the Mycelial Network of community asset developers across England, sharing resources through our local and wider mycelial roots.



Independent

We keep our creative autonomy through diverse income streams, and we speak up when it matters, such as when a building or freedom of creative expression is at risk or a community is being priced out.



Test Bed for Imagination

We believe art can transform the everyday and push back against who usually gets to be heard. We are open for people that traditional cultural spaces often leave out: grassroots artists, makers, freelancers, other creatives, and audiences new to it all. People are given space to try things, experiment and develop bold ideas.



The Challenges We Address

Affordable creative space

Access to affordable venues for creation, exhibition and performance remains a growing barrier for Bristol's artists.

Urban decay & neglect

Vacant, deteriorating buildings blight communities. We demonstrate that cultural reuse delivers social and economic value.

Isolation & exclusion

Our open studios, exhibitions and community programming create welcoming spaces, through Sparks we also provide space for those who don't feel 'art' is for them.

20 Years In Bristol

The story so far: From a first meanwhile project in the 1990s in London to becoming a cornerstone of Bristol's creative ecology and national voice on community-led regeneration.

2018–2026

Artspace Lifespace replaces one crumbling heritage pile for another. Our meanwhile lease at Jacobs Wells Baths ended and we took on the meanwhile custodianship of the iconic Grade I listed manor house Ashton Court creating The Arts Mansion. With funding from Arts Council England and Historic England, Artspace Lifespace hosts FuturVille and The People's Mansion.

2020–2021

Artspace Lifespace weathers a pandemic but Space Gallery closes. Launches a sculpture park at Ashton Court with funding from Arts Council England and We are From Dust and supports Show of Strength Theatre with The Mansion Through Time.

2016

Artspace Lifespace becomes a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (constitution signed 6 June; registered 11 July; began trading as a charity 1 October 2016).

2022–ongoing

Artspace Lifespace signs an initial 1-year lease on 78–82 Broadmead, creating Sparks Bristol in partnership with Global Goals Centre with Invisible Circus design and build, opening to the public in May 2023.

2006

Doug and Wim move the Invisible Circus to Bristol. With support from Ruth Essex and Bristol City Council's Capacity Project, they open disused public spaces for creative use and Artspace Lifespace is officially born.

2012

Artspace Lifespace becomes a Community Interest Company.

2025

Named one of just 5 Community-Led High Street Innovators nationally by Power to Change; Awarded first international grant via British Council; The Vestibules closes after 8 years.

2007

Artspace Lifespace takes over the old Bridewell complex, the Old Courts, Fire Station, CID building and Old Police Station (now The Island).

2008–2010

The Invisible Circus hosts the legendary Carnyville events, immersive extravaganzas filling the whole of the Island complex.

2026

Ashton Court Mansion closes after 8 years. Vacant Property Toolkit launched. Artspace Lifespace turns 20!

2025 In Numbers

Across The Island, Sparks Bristol, Arts Mansion and BroadmeadXP, this is what one year of affordable creative space made possible.

50

Creatives with
studio desk
space at Sparks

£32,299

Value of staff time & space
given in kind for residencies

517K+

Total visits across The Island,
Sparks and Arts Mansion

29

Traders supported
with affordable space
at Sparks

5

Community-Led High
Street Innovators nationally
– and ASLS was one!

105

Artists in studios at
The Island

2,633

Volunteer hours donated
to Sparks Bristol

775K+

Total income, YE 2025

* BroadmeadXP visitors numbers not recorded

The Island

Our longest-running venue and the original heart of Artspace Lifespace, The Island is home to artist studios, a circus studio, dance studio, gallery and basement venue in the old Bridewell Police Station



69,346

Individual visitors in 2025

3,146

Circus Studio visits
(354 classes)

43

Artist studios
(105 artists)

6,979

Dance Studio visits
(687 classes)

6,249

Venue/Cell visits
(61 events, incl. 27
club nights)

2,292

Gallery visits
(61 events)

“Having a studio space in The Island has been essential to the development of my artistic practice in recent years. The friendly and helpful staff, affordable space and central town location have meant I've been able to grow my projects and collaborate with organisations across Bristol.”

– Island Studio Holder



Sparks Bristol

Bristol's award-winning art and sustainability department store, Sparks brings together independent traders, studio artists and public events under one roof in Broadmead. In 2025 it contributes 47% of its earned income to our core costs.

"Sparks has given me the platform and support to turn my passion into a full-time business – it's an amazing space and provides endless opportunity for our community."

– Sparks Trader





421,347

Ground floor individual visits

191

Events in event spaces

7,640

Event space visitors

8

Artist Residencies

Broadmead XP

A residency art gallery and workshop space for Art100 CIC, plus hireable space for Playback Arcade & Retro Gaming Exhibition, and a weekly Tuesday craft club for elders from the Hong Kong and Chinese community, hosted by Art100 Gallery and One Green Kitchen CIC



The Vestibules

After eight years of creative activity, we said goodbye to The Vestibules at City Hall in October 2025, having been unable to secure the private investment needed to sustain its running costs. Its creative legacy continues through Coe Gallery's seasonal exhibition programme and the Pride Hub, both still based there with Bristol City Council's support.

Thank you all those who made the Vestibules a creative space.

"Since 2021, we've hosted seven exhibitions at The Vestibules, which have become our staple summer and winter shows. Their support has not only empowered us as curators and artists, but also enriched the wider public's access to meaningful, often underrepresented, cultural narratives."

– Jasmine Coe, Founder of Coe Gallery



Thank you all those who made the Vestibules a creative space

A Celebration of Modern Romania,
A Community Shelter
A Life, A Presence like the Air
Amy Densley UWE Exhibition
Amy Hutchings and Anna Haydock-Wilson
ArTex
Ben David Jenner & Emily Lucas
Ben Meller
Bolarinwa R&D Residency &
Boomsatsuma Filming
Bristol Arts on Referral Alliance
Bristol CLT
Bristol Pride Hub
Brush and Biro
Brook Tate
Changes Bristol
Children's participation In City Spaces
Chris Rydlewski
Circus City at The Vestibules
Coe Gallery
Creative Shift Arts on Referral
Daisy Hunter Residency
Displace - Synecdoche Art
Dolores Belovitch Residency
Esmé Miranda Perriman
Eva Millauer Residency
Festive Vestibule Pop Up Market
Freya Morrill
Going, Going, Gone
Harriet Porter
Jack Stilling
Jamie Lee Residency

Jasmine
Jenni Stuart
Jessie Beurs
Karen Thompson - UWE
Katie Marland Residency
Latte Leninism - Martha Kelsey
Lost and Found
M2 AIR SHARE
Matthew Brown Bristol University
Mihai - Nu Nu Theatre Installation
MMM.. CultureHospicecare Fundraiser
MouthWash
Near Death Experience
Ollie Habermehl and Ethan Byrne
Presca Sustainable Sportswear Pop-Up Shop
Pride Hub
Rachelle Aaronson R&D and Residency
Romanian Contemporary Art
Startup Stories
Stokes Croft Land Trust
Stories of carers (unpaid) Residency
Tabitha Gammer residency +
Tangible Memories Parlours of Wonder
The Killing Kind Filming
This is Us - Tina Gue Residency
Thomas Astley
Unlocked
UWE Design students 100 year anniversary of
council housing
UWE Photography Students -
Whose Future - Rising Arts Residency
Yuko Edwards



Going, Going, Gone! Exhibition
and Silent Auction © Rewild

Arts Mansion

Since taking on the lease in 2018, visitors often commented how they got married or had their prom again. With our lease coming to an end in 2026 we wanted a whole new host of visitors looking to get married there in the future to say "I once came to an amazing party here". Our Venue Manager Jenna Graves doubled visitor numbers and events at Arts Mansion in 2025 by focusing on public and music events at this striking heritage building, closing out 2025 with a labyrinth themed New Years Eve celebration.

27,039

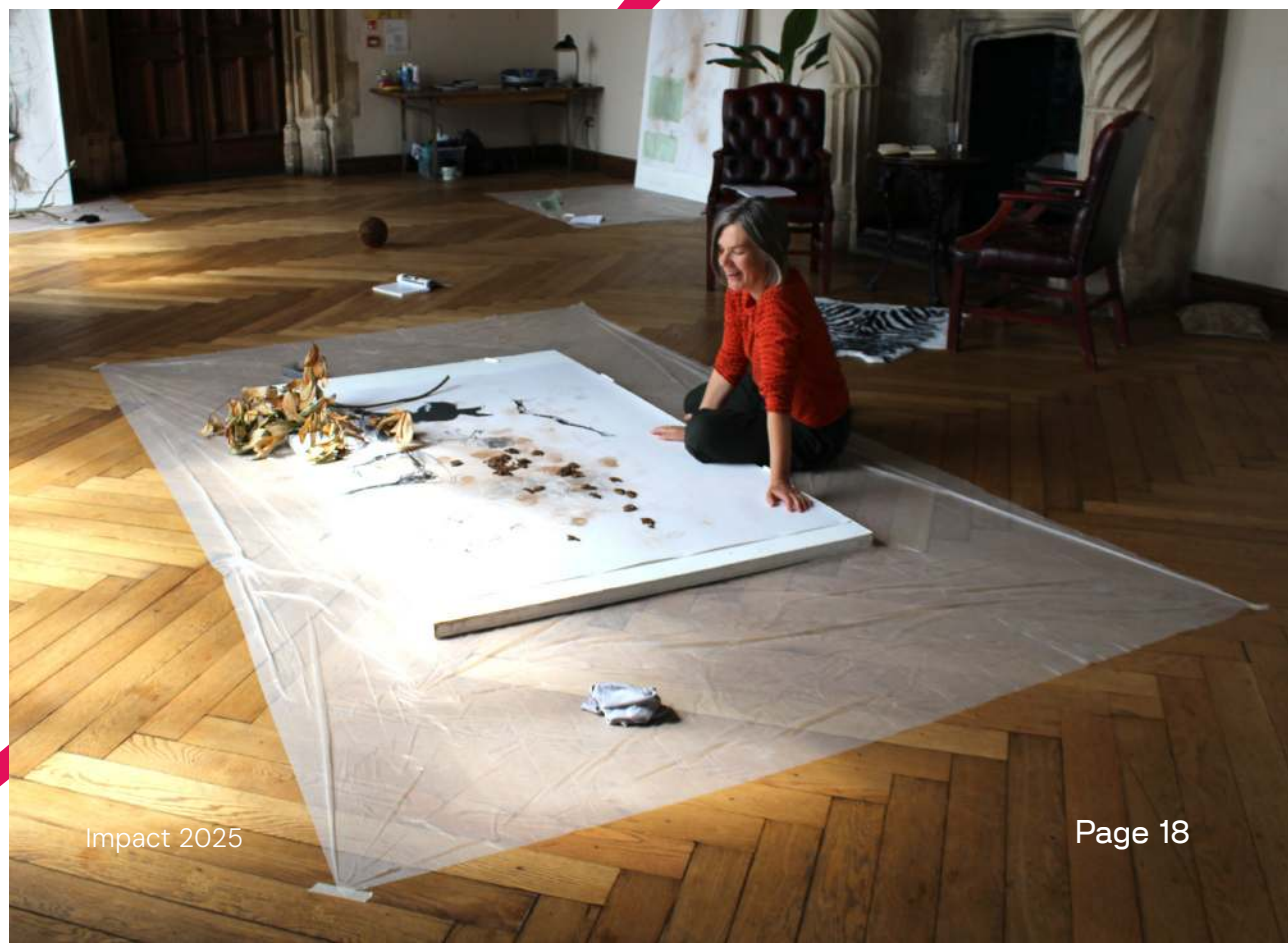
Visitors (more than double last year)

109

Events hosted

"Jenna and her team were utterly amazing! They ensured we were able to plan and execute our vision – nothing was a problem. This architectural icon has been a huge part of our lives since moving to Bristol nearly 30 years ago, and it was a real privilege to work with Artspace."

– Arts Mansion Hirer



Arts Mansion



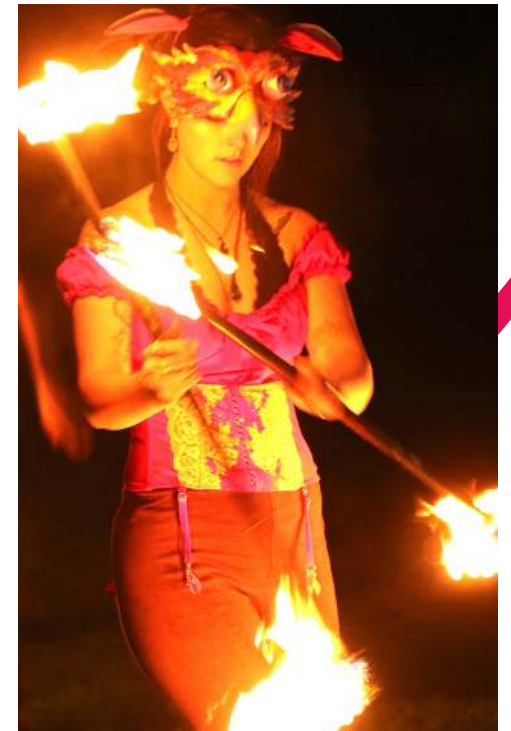
© Zara Williams – Clothemod Runway

Artspace UK



© Jamie Sanders – New Years Eve 2025/6

Impact 2025





In Focus: Our Community

RESIDENCY: Ourcylum: Roux Burroughs, aka Gender Criminal

The Island Bristol

Behind every number is a person making work that wouldn't otherwise exist. We gave a total of 28 residencies Space-in-Kind and staff support across all of our venues, valued at over £32K.



"I wouldn't have been able to create and develop work without the pressure of funds if it wasn't for Artspace Lifespace. They are a lifeblood for underrepresented creatives."

– Roux Burroughs, aka Gender Criminal

Gender Criminal is a multi-disciplinary storyteller, gender educator, director and producer working across drag, queer live art, wordsmithery and community organisation. Roux used the cells at The Island to develop a new piece and staged an end-of-residency performance, Ourcylum.



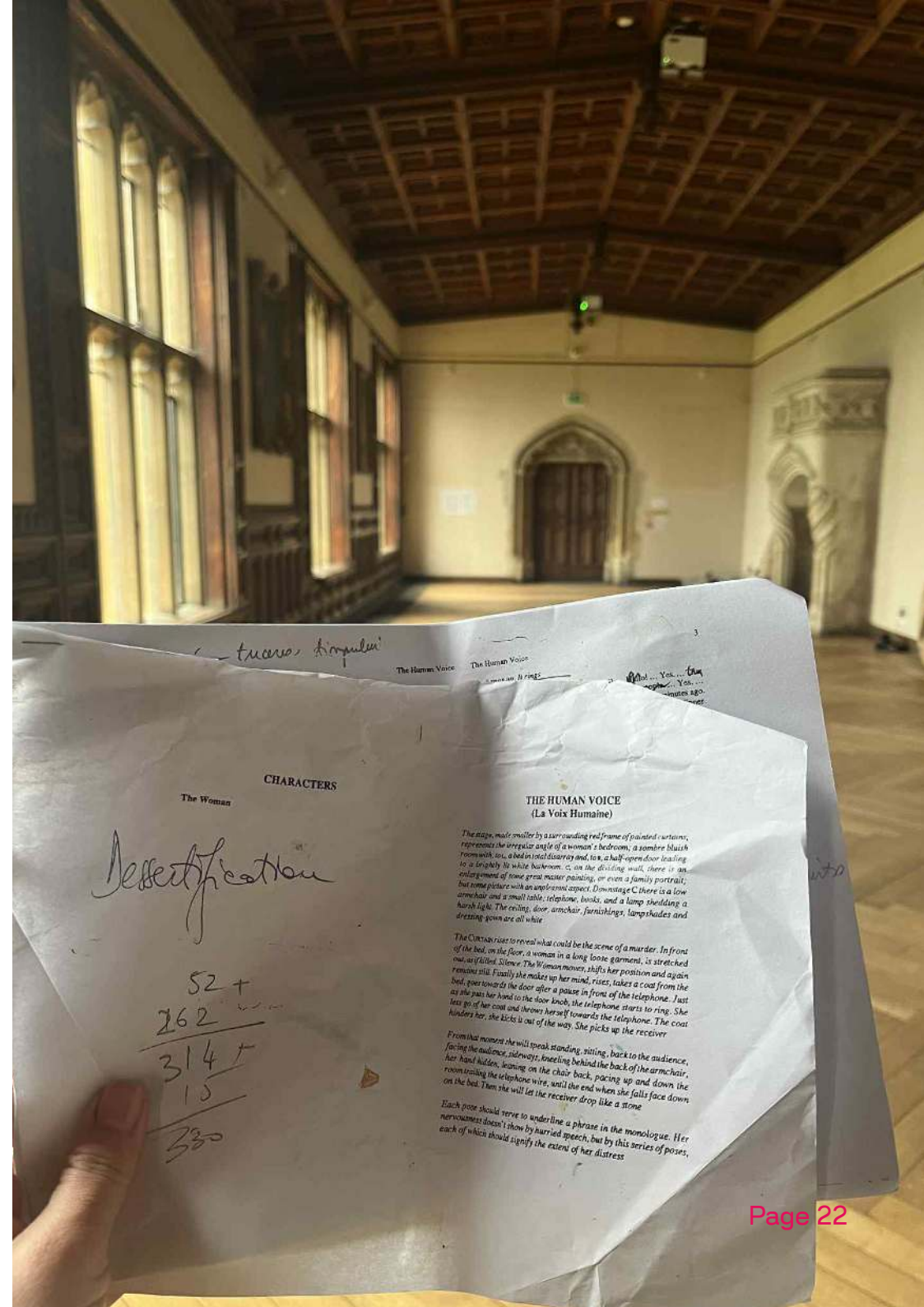
RESIDENCY: Nu Nu Theatre

Arts Mansion

Nu Nu Theatre produces work inclusive of second-language actors, performers for whom English is a second language. They needed rehearsal space for a production involving dialogue and ample movement, where they could rehearse freely with text, props and a minimal set and Artspace Lifespace offered them residency space at Arts Mansion.

“Artspace Lifespace generously gave us access to rehearsal space, which made a huge difference to our preparation. Having a quiet, supportive environment where we could focus without pressure was incredibly valuable. It’s rare to find spaces like this, especially offered in kind – we’re really thankful for the opportunity and support.”

– Ileana Gherghina, Nu Nu Theatre



RESIDENCY: Bristol Women's Voice: International Women's Day

The Vestibules

Bristol Women's Voice used the Park Street Vestibule to host their International Women's Day event, part of a wider day of activity at City Hall.

"I just wanted to say a huge thank you for all your support for this year's IWD event. It's been lovely collaborating with you. We recorded that 500 people visited the Park St vestibule throughout the day!"

– Madie Lewis, Bristol Women's Voice



RESIDENCY: Creative Youth Network

Sparks Bristol

For two months, part of the ground floor of Sparks became a gallery for Bristol's next generation of artists – an exhibition curated entirely by young creatives from Creative Youth Network.

"It was lovely to have the opportunity to exhibit the work of our young emerging artists with a wider audience that comes to Sparks"

– Ylvi Jara, Creative Manager at Creative Youth Network



Why Affordable Space Matters

Each year we survey studio holders, circus studio members and traders across The Island and Sparks Bristol to understand the financial realities of Bristol's creative community.

Response rates remained strong in both years: in 2025, 35% of Island Artist Studio Holders, 66% of Island Circus Studio Members, 41% of Sparks Studio Holders and 45% of Sparks Traders took part; in 2026, that was 38% of Island Studio Holders, 68% of Circus Space Members, 27% of Sparks Studio Holders and 62% of Sparks Traders.

The 2026 results tell us a story of gradual, hard-won improvement, but sadly not of a crisis that has passed. Financial precarity across Bristol's creative community has eased slightly according to our survey. However in some cases improvements were due to just a few respondents whose circumstances have improved creating a rosier overall picture. The reality for most artists is still stark.

46.2%

Of Sparks Traders earn below £20k/year

48.5%

Average share of respondents earning below £20k/year across all four surveys

56.2%

Of Sparks Studio Holders earn below £20k/year

60.5%

Of Island Studio Holders would work full-time as an artist if income was not a barrier

From April 2026, the UK National Living Wage rose to £12.71 an hour, equivalent to roughly £24,785 a year for a 37.5-hour week. That figure is still well above what most of the artists, studio holders and traders we surveyed earn from all sources combined: even with the improvements seen this year, around half of respondents remain below £20k a year, and the majority of creatives at Sparks continue to earn less than the full-time minimum-wage equivalent.

Hours of usage held roughly steady or dipped slightly, with Island Studio Holders showing the clearest decline. The average time Island Studio Holders spend in their studio fell from around 18.9 hours a week in 2025 to about 15.8 hours in 2026, a drop of roughly 3 hours, or about 16%. The shift is visible across the distribution: the share putting in 21+ hours a week fell from 46% to 28%, while the share in the lower 6–10 hour band grew from 14% to 25%.

Sparks Studio Holders show a smaller version of the same pattern, the average weekly hours dipped modestly from about 12.3 to 11.2, though the shape changed too, with responses consolidating around the 11 – 20 hour

band (50% of respondents in 2026, up from 25% in 2025).

Circus Studio Members are the exception: average training frequency was essentially flat at 2.4 days a week in both years, with only a small shift from “once a week” toward “twice a week” as the most common answer.

Taken together with this year’s income and full-time-barrier findings, it’s worth flagging that even as financial precarity eased slightly overall, the people using The Island studio space the most intensively, appear to be spending somewhat less time there, which could point to more members balancing studio practice against other paid work

Positive progress this year is in how people feel about affordability itself. The share of Island Studio Holders describing their rent as “a financial strain” fell from 17.6% to 7.7%, and the share who called it comfortably affordable roughly doubled, from 23.5% to 41.0%. Sparks Traders reporting their fee as affordable rose from 23% to 53%. Artspace Lifespace has continued to hold prices through a period of rising operational costs as well as rising costs elsewhere in the city.

Why Affordable Space Matters



When asked what would most help them sustain their practice, artists in 2026 pointed to the same things as in 2025: a Universal Basic Income for Artists, more grants and funding opportunities, affordable housing, and more time freed up from other work. The data demonstrates that Artspace Lifespace is succeeding in our mission of providing affordable space, and that this affordability is doing real, measurable work in the lives of the people who use it, but also reinforces why affordable studio space is not a nice-to-have, it is an essential lifeline. For many of our creatives, the subsidised space we offer is what makes creative practice possible at all.



© Shamphat

This year's figures saw more of our artists tell us their space feels genuinely affordable. But the fact that Bristol is now Britain's least affordable city to rent in, half our community still earns under £20k a year, Bristol's culture funding remains precarious; and real term funding has been slashed nationally. While funding has yet to be identified to provide support for artist studios, we know that it is a priority; with CVAN lobbying for long term strategies to protect affordable workspaces and WEMCA and Arts Council England have acknowledged the creative workplace shortage. We know affordable space is not the whole answer to the precarity facing Bristol's creatives, but the data proves it's a vital part of it.

– Kathryn Chiswell Jones, Artspace Lifespace

Partnerships & Recognition

2025 brought national recognition for a model of community-led regeneration we've been building in Bristol for two decades.

National recognition

- Named one of just five Community-Led High Street Innovators in the country by Power to Change, alongside Southmead Development Trust (Bristol), Dewsbury Arcade Group (Dewsbury), MadLab (Stockport) and Make LCR / Make CIC (Birkenhead), working alongside Bristol's Vacant Property Task Force on the future of Broadmead.
- Awarded our first international grant via the British Council's Connections Through Culture programme, for [There Is No Place Like Home](#), a collaboration with Dr Tia Reihana (New Zealand) and Cleo Lake.
- Hosted a tour of Ashton Court Mansion for Sadik Al-Hassan MP, Historic England's South West Regional Director, the Leader of Bristol City Council and the Council's Chief

Executive advocating for Ashton Court Mansion's restoration to be taken on by a charitable trust.

- Our CEO represented Artspace Lifespace at the Scottish Cities Alliance's Peer-to-Peer Event on Retail and the Night-Time Economy in Glasgow, sharing our model with cities across the UK.

Ongoing networks & partnerships

- Bristol Culture Network (formerly DIY Arts Network)
- The Mycelial Network – a peer solidarity network of 30+ Community Asset Developers stewarding land and buildings nationally.
- The Vacant Property Task Force
- The Invisible Circus – our sister organisation, sharing leadership and collaborating on site-specific performance and community projects.
- Global Goals Centre – our partner in repurposing the former Marks & Spencer building in Broadmead into Sparks Bristol.

YE 2025

Finances At A Glance

Income	2024	2025	Change
Donations & Grants	£76,683	£79,820	+£3,137
Charitable Activities	£587,143	£679,212	+£92,069
Other Trading	£0	£13,549	+£13,549
Investments	£2,307	£2,778	+£471
Total Income	£666,133	£775,359	+£109,226

Expenditure	2024	2025	Change
Raising Funds	£12,250	£9,784	-£2,466
Charitable Activities	£593,938	£683,171	+£89,233
Total Expenditure	£606,188	£692,818	+£86,630

£72,958

Net cash inflow, YE 2025 (vs.
£43,254 surplus in 2024)

£328,516

Net assets at year end
(vs. £254,975 in 2024)

£189,032

Free reserves at year end

£161,205

Target free reserves (min. 3
months' operating costs)

Of the project funding received, some of this has been recorded as income in Year End 2025 but is due to be spent in Year End 2026.

Our impact is driven by our people. When the charity achieves financial resilience and successfully maintains our target three-month reserve baseline, the Board approves a modest, collective staff wellbeing distribution.

This includes:

- A winter bonus equal to 1.25% of gross salary to support staff during traditionally high-strain months.
- The introduction of a £100 individual wellbeing pot in 2025.

These modest benefits are contingent on the charity's overall financial health rather than individual performance, ensuring excellent stewardship of our funds while actively combating sector burnout.

With the temporary nature of our meanwhile spaces, our reserves position gives us the confidence to plan and undertake new projects and to keep building towards a long-term, capital-invested future for The Island.



Thanks

None of this is possible without the team, funders, partners, volunteers and patrons who back our belief that Bristol needs affordable creative space.

With particular thanks this year to:

Our Team and Partners

- Our core team across our Arts Mansion, Island and Sparks venues
- The Artspace Lifespace trustees
- Global Goals Centre
- The Friends of Ashton Court Mansion

Core Funders

- Nisbet Trust
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Bristol City Council Cultural Investment Programme 'Openness' Fund

Project Funders

- Arts Funding & Philanthropy (Cause4 Ltd)
- British Council — Connections Through Culture Programme

- Power to Change — Community-Led High Street Innovators
- Historic England

Our Patrons

- Colin Barns
- Laura Ferrario

ProBono Support

- Womble Bond Dickinson, for pro bono support to the Vacant Property Taskforce
- Our generous Volunteers (who donated 2,663 hours of their time to support Sparks in 2024/2025)

And to every artist, studio holder, trader, hirer and visitor who has made a space in one of our buildings their own this year, thank you for making the case for affordable creative space by showing that wonderful things can take place when you create space for imagination.



Looking Ahead: The Next 20 Years

At year end 2025, the tools to shift the wider paradigm weren't yet in place, but seeds of change were in the air this spring, when the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act received Royal Assent on 29 April 2026. Our focus moving forward into 2026 is as follows:

Deepening our networks

Building on the strong, values-aligned partnerships we've established, and connecting with grassroots organisations, through our mycelial networks locally and nationally to shape our collaborative approach.

Positioning Artspace Lifespace as an investable proposition

Exploring blended funding models that go beyond traditional grant funding to sustain and scale our impact.

Capturing and sharing our learning

Launching a legacy toolkit in 2026 that distils the insights, strategies and models we've developed, equipping others to lead grassroots regeneration in their own neighbourhoods.

Seeking capital funding for The Island

Pursuing long-term investment to carry out essential accessibility and sustainability works at our flagship venue so that the Island is secured for another 20 years.

Our New Mission

Approaching 20 years of managing Artspaces in Bristol, we have used this milestone to review our mission, vision, values and goals for the next decade.

Launching a [legacy toolkit](#) in 2026

Keep in touch

Sign up to our monthly [Artspace Lifespace Newsletter](#) and the occasional Sparks newsletter

Follow us on socials @artspaceuk @theislandbristol @sparksbristol

[Hire a space](#) for your next event with us.

Or come to an [Event](#) held at one of our Venues.

Become a [Patron or Donate](#) to Support our Work.

Artspace UK

Artspace UK is the trading name of Artspace Lifespace, a Charity Registered in England and Wales, Registered Charity No 1168150

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@ArtspaceUK (Instagram/FB)

Trading Subsidiary, Artspace Lifespace Enterprises
Ltd. Company No: 10396284



APPENDIX

Year End 2026 Artspace User Survey Analysis

Year End 2026 Artspace User Survey Analysis

This appendix presents the full results of the Year End 2026 user surveys of Sparks Studio Holders, Sparks Traders, Island Studio Holders and Island Circus Studio Members, compared against the Year End 2025 results reported in last year's Impact Report.

1. Response Rates

Response counts and rates below are final, based on the confirmed 2026 population size for each group (as recorded at survey close) against the number of completed responses.

Survey group	2025 responses	2025 rate	2026 population	2026 responses	2026 rate
Island Artist Studio Holders	35	35%	105	40	38.1%
Island Circus Studio Members	33	66%	50	33	66%
Sparks Studio Holders	20	41%	68	18	26.5%
Sparks Traders	13	45%	26	16	61.5%

2. Income Below £20k Per Annum

The share of respondents in each group reporting total annual income (from all sources) below £20,000.

Survey group	2025	2026	Change
Sparks Studio Holders	70% (14/20)	56.2% (9/16)	Down 13.8 pts
Sparks Traders	75% (9/12)	46.2% (6/13)	Down 28.8 pts
Island Studio Holders	59.4% (19/32)	46.2% (18/39)	Down 13.2 pts
Island Circus Studio Members	45.5% (15/33)	45.5% (15/33)	No change
Average across all four surveys	62.5%	48.2%	Down 14.0 pts

(Note: denominators vary slightly from total respondent counts because a small number of respondents skipped the income question)

Year End 2026 Artspace User Survey Analysis

3. Income as a Barrier to Working Full-Time

Share of respondents who said they would work full-time as an artist / trader / circus artist if income were not a barrier.

Survey group	2025	2026	Change
Sparks Studio Holders	45.0%	25%	Down 20 pts
Sparks Traders	27.3%	28.6%	Up 1.3 pts
Island Studio Holders	67.7%	60.5%	Down 7.2 pts
Island Circus Studio Members	36.4%	27.3%	Down 9.1 pts

4. Perceived Affordability of Rent / Membership Fee

Respondents were asked whether they feel their studio rent, licence fee or membership is affordable. Full breakdowns below.

Survey group	Year	Yes	Just about	No, financial strain
Sparks Studio Holders	2025	40% (8)	55% (11)	5% (1)
Sparks Studio Holders	2026	55.6% (10)	22.2% (4)	22.2% (4)
Sparks Traders	2025	23.1% (3)	76.9% (10)	0% (0)
Sparks Traders	2026	53.3% (8)	46.7% (7)	0% (0)
Island Studio Holders	2025	23.5% (8)	58.8% (20)	17.6% (6)
Island Studio Holders	2026	41% (16)	51.3% (20)	7.7% (3)
Circus Studio Holders	2025	72.7% (24)	27.3% (9)	0% (0)
Circus Studio Holders	2026	69.7% (23)	30.3% (10)	0% (0)

5. What Would Most Help Sustain Practice

The top answers were consistent across both years and across all four groups.

- **Universal Basic Income for Artists:** the single most-cited answer among all four groups in 2026 (it was the top answer for Island Studio Holders and Circus Studio Members in 2025 too)
- **Affordable housing:** moved up to the clear second-place answer for Island Studio Holders in 2026, and remained prominent among Sparks Traders, unsurprising given that Bristol is now cited as the most expensive place in the UK to rent.
- **More grants and funding opportunities:** the top answer among Sparks Studio Holders and Traders in 2025; still in the top two or three for every group in 2026
- **More time / fewer other work commitments:** the top answer among Circus Studio Members in 2025 and still the second most-cited in 2026, reflecting how many combine circus practice with other jobs
- **Lower studio costs:** cited less often in 2026 than 2025 among Island Studio Holders, consistent with the improvement in perceived affordability noted above. Despite our overheads and other cost of living increasing, the amount we charged creatives remained the same.

6. Selected Respondent Quotes (2026, anonymised)

"Sparks Studio has provided me with one of the most effective and critical opportunities in my practice; a truly affordable, cheap, consistent, space to make models and costumes. My work cannot be done with a desk and a computer alone." – Sparks Studio Holder, 2026

"Sparks has enabled me to begin and grow my business in a safe space. The cost of renting is so unaffordable and scary, when you're beginning with not much money, the thought of taking a risk like renting a shop seems like a far off dream. Now, after 3 years with Sparks, I feel like that dream actually might be within reach one day." – Sparks Trader, 2026

"Without The Island I genuinely don't know how I could sustain working freelance. I need the space, my community there, my sense of belonging and reassurance that no matter how many times I have to move, I still have my desk." – Island Studio Holder, 2026

"Professional training spaces are hard to come by and this one is well organised and affordable and has a good community feel." – Circus Studio Member, 2026

Notes:

- 2026 response rates are based on confirmed population figures for each group (recorded at survey close).
- Sample sizes are modest (13–40 respondents per group in 2026), so year-on-year percentage shifts, especially in smaller groups like Sparks Traders should be read as meaningful trends rather than statistically precise findings.
- Respondents are self-selecting, which may bias results toward those with stronger views (positive or negative) about their space.
- Income bands are self-reported in ranges rather than exact figures, so "below £20k" is a lower-bound estimate based on the two lowest bands offered ("Under £15,000" and "£15,001 to £20,000").

APPENDIX 2: ACCESSIBILITY & GLOSSARY

Accessibility statement for the Artspace UK Impact Report 2025

Artspace UK (the trading name of Artspace Lifespace, registered charity no. 1168150) wants as many people as possible to be able to read this report. We have tried to make this report easy to read but you are welcome to ask us for the report in an accessible Word format if you have difficulty reading this pdf.

Email info@artspace.uk or write to:

Artspace UK, c/o
The Island,
Nelson Street,
Bristol,
BS1 2BE.

We will aim to reply within 5 working days.

Tell us about a problem

If you find something in this report that you cannot access, or you have ideas for improving it, please contact us using the details above. We will try to fix it or give you the information another way.

Plain-English Glossary

About the organisation and its work

Artspace UK / Artspace Lifespace: the same charity. “Artspace UK” is the name we trade under.

Meanwhile use / meanwhile model: using an empty building for a short time, until the owner has other plans for it.

Meanwhile lease / custodianship: a temporary agreement to look after and use a building.

Heritage building / Grade I listed: a building protected by law because of its historic importance. Grade I is the highest level of protection.

Venue: any of our buildings that people use or visit, such as The Island, Sparks Bristol, The Vestibules or Arts Mansion.

Studio holder: an artist who rents a studio or desk in one of our buildings.

Trader: a small independent business that rents space in Sparks Bristol.

Circus studio member: someone who pays to train in The Island’s circus studio.

Hirer: a person or group who pays to use a space for an event.

Residency: when an artist or group is given space, and sometimes staff support, for a set time to make or practise work.

Space-in-kind: free space or staff time given instead of money.

Pop-up: a short-term shop, market or exhibition.

Organisations and networks

Charity / CIC / CIO: types of organisation. A charity works for public benefit. A CIC is a Community Interest Company, a business that exists for community benefit. A CIO is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, a legal form designed for charities.

Mycelial Network: a group of 30+ community organisations across England that look after land and buildings and support each other. “Mycelium” is the underground network of fungi, which is the image behind the name.

Community asset developer: a community group that takes on, repairs and runs a building or land for local benefit.

Community-Led High Street Innovators: a Power to Change programme that recognised five community projects working to bring life back to high streets.

Vacant Property Task Force: a group working on how empty commercial buildings in Bristol can be put back to use.

Arts Council England: the national body that funds arts and culture in England.

CVAN: Contemporary Visual Arts Network, a group that speaks up for visual artists and the places they work.

WEMCA: West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, the regional government body for the Bristol area.

Pro bono: professional help given for free.

Patron: someone who gives regular financial support.

Money

YE 2025: year end 2025, meaning our financial year, which ended on Sep 30 2025.

Income: money we receive.

Expenditure: money we spend.

Charitable activities (income): money we earn from running our spaces, such as studio license and hire fees.

Charitable activities (spending): what it costs us to run those spaces and programmes.

Net cash inflow / surplus: money coming in minus money going out.

Net assets: everything we own minus everything we owe.

Free reserves: savings that we can spend on anything. They are a safety net.

Target free reserves: the amount we aim to keep in free reserves. We aim for at least three months of running costs.

Earned income: money we make ourselves, not from grants or donations.

Capital funding: money for buildings and major repairs, not for day-to-day running.

Blended funding / investable proposition: mixing different kinds of money (grants, loans, investment, earned income). “Investable” means a project someone could put money into with the aim of getting it back.

Core costs: the basic costs of keeping the organisation running, such as rent, utilities and core staff.

Survey and research terms

Response rate: the share of people we asked who answered the survey.

Self-selecting: people chose whether to answer, so the results may not represent everyone.

Percentage points (pts): the difference between two percentages.

Income below £20k: total yearly income from all sources, before tax, under £20,000.

National Living Wage: the legal minimum hourly pay for workers aged 21 and over in the UK.

Universal Basic Income (UBI): a regular payment to everyone, with no conditions, to cover basic needs.

Financial precarity: not having stable or secure income.

Other words used in the report

Civic infrastructure: the things a community depends on, like libraries, parks and public spaces.

Grassroots: led by ordinary people in the community, not by large organisations.

Legacy toolkit: a guide we are creating to share what we’ve learned, so others can run similar projects.

Cultural reuse: giving an empty building a new life as a place for arts and culture.