**Counter Culture**

**Collaborative Innovation Project for Cheltenham Economic Recovery**

Culture holds up a mirror to our tired streets, squares, buildings and civic spaces and asks us to look again at what makes them special. It gives people the opportunity to connect their individual stories with collective narratives, helping to make their place feel like home. Culture provides people with ways to explore, celebrate and create shared experiences. It brings depth and meaning to people’s experience of a place, highlighting the extraordinary in the ordinary.

*People, culture, place, The role of culture in placemaking, Local Government Association*

**Project Initiation Document**

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**December 2020**

**Introduction**

Cheltenham, as an epicentre of cultural and digital activity, has the unique potential to place a collaborative innovation project at the heart of its economic and wellbeing recovery. By aligning the town’s cultural, business, environmental, community and digital ventures, the Counter Culture project would not only act as a useful tool for post COVID-19 recovery, but also provide a lighthouse example of how Cheltenham, and other towns and cities can rejuvenate and adapt to the changing face of our retail centres. For Cheltenham, it provides an opportunity on how we can shine a light on the truly unique offering of the town as a cultural and cyber pioneer, linking into ambitions for climate change. The project would ensure Cheltenham effectively maximises the potential of these attributes and USPs to the benefit of local businesses and the wider community

This Project Initiation Document (PID) sets the context for a pilot project to test the business case and the opportunity for the project to:

1. To feed back into government as an active case study to inspire other local authority areas to address the challenges of vacant units within their retail centres.
2. To better understand the financial model that would be required to extend the pilot
3. To better understand and test solutions for the constraints to accessing and bringing forward vacant units within the context of the counter culture proposal

**Objective**

Counter Culture is an innovative project that facilitates the curation of partnerships between local businesses, communities, cultural producers and digital innovators to repurpose empty retail units across Cheltenham town centre in response to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in the first instance, but with the ambition that this project forms part of the broader regeneration of the town centre if the pilot is successful and risks appropriately mitigated.

* To act as a catalyst for regeneration and support for town centre economic recovery
* Ensure a sustainable business model can be created that limits the financial costs of set up and understands and has a response to the barriers to bringing forward vacant units
* Collaboration with landlords and owners to fully understands the issues and challenges of bringing temporary uses to vacant units
* Brings forward an underutilised asset
* Stimulates footfall and maximises dwell time for the end users

The objectives of this project are aligned with the Cheltenham Place Vision <https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/downloads/file/6343/cheltenham_place_vision> Cheltenham Economic Recovery Strategy <https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/recovery-strategy> ,Cheltenham Economic Recovery Task Force Business Plan xx to insert when link livexx , GFirst LEP’s Local Industrial Strategy <https://www.gfirstlep.com/industrial-strategy/>, and support the early consultation work done by Cheltenham Culture Board in drafting the Cheltenham Cultural Strategy.

With a commitment to working towards a carbon neutral town by 2030, Counter Culture offers the opportunity to build the climate change conversation into wider activities, to promote the town’s core vision and strategy, enhance the experience of people in the town and enable an ongoing engagement on the priorities for leadership that will impact on all our lives.

**In Scope**

Vacant properties - those within the first 3 months of their vacant (thereby wholly exempt from business rates)

Vacant listed buildings which are exempt from business rates until they are occupied (lobbying taking place on continued relief for temporary occupation)

Taking account of priorities, the following sectors are in scope

* Cyber
* Digital
* Sustainability/environmental
* Culture
* Retail
* Food & Beverage
* Community sector

**Project Outline**

The recommendation is the pilot runs for a minimum of 6 weeks allowing for the;

* Project to gather momentum from a marketing and footfall perspective
* Pilot to demonstrate a range activities Counter Culture could host
* Investment in empty unit to be maximised

Engagement is currently underway with a potential landlord. This could provide a unit that allows us to maximise the potential to test the project outcomes and would include 3 distinct area of activity within the activated vacant retail unit. These being;

1. **STUDIO:** Gallery / Performance / Workshops / Events / Public Engagement Projects / Multifunctional / Launches /

* Keeps the pop up fresh with a variety of activity and using the SOOK technology this can be on a high rotation.
* Provides income opportunities
* Allows for targeting different audiences daytime / evening / open or private

1. **MAKERSPACE:** Artists in residency / culminate in a showcase piece of work telling the story of community partners / public looking into Makerspace /
2. **COMMERCIAL:** Retail and food and beverage that is complimentary retail offering to Makerspace ie prints / Independent locally sourced food and drink in street food fashion

**Project Partners**

Having identified the key areas to deliver success Counter Culture would work with several project partners each who bring expertise and/or help remove barriers and add value to the project.

Suggested partners include:

**Landlord/Agent –** Access to vacant unit. live discussions currently taking place. The partner landlord/agent would be engaged on all elements needed to ‘open up the building’. Compliance on H&S, rates and an overall willingness to provide the space at no cost to support this as a pilot project that is testing the principles.

**Cheltenham Borough Council** – Key role in enabling the project

**Business & Digital** – Organisations e.g. Sook who could provide the supporting digital infrastructure to enable a multifunctional space.

**Marketing** **and communications**– Marketing Cheltenham to be lead and agree marketing and communications plan. Engagement with agents

**Sustainability** – establish a partner to underpin the project.

**Pop Up/Content Partners** – To be agreed

**Cultural Rep** – Cheltenham Festivals

**Community Rep** – Gloucestershire Association of Volunteer and Community Groups

**Business Rep** – Growth Hub

**Digital Rep** – To be confirmed

**Deliverables/Outcomes**

To make the Counter Culture project viable in its earliest stages, by:

* Identifying a willing landlord. The Promenade has been identified as one of these key areas. Its premises, in the main benefit from Listed building business rates exemptions, so there is no incentive for the landlords to bring these into active use
* Removing barriers to access to vacant units
* Develop a sustainable business model that builds in a % revenue share from commercial partnerships with the objective of building up a counter culture fund for further roll out of the Counter Culture proposal
* Identify partner(s) who will act as curator
* Identify funding options including:
  + Covid-19 recovery based grants
  + Secure investment from key partners
  + Establish Counter Culture crowdfunding

Key Milestones are:

To add

**Benefits**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **To the Town** | **To the landlord** | **To the identified users** |
| * Stimulating the local economy * Reinvigorate the town centre * Promote the climate change agenda * Develop a platform where Tech Companies can work with Cultural Producers, further developing Cheltenham’s USP | * Bringing activation to a vacant upon which the agent marketing the unit can capitalise * Providing a PR and Marketing point of difference for Cheltenham * Using assets to deliver social value locally and contribute to more corporate Sustainable Development Goals and the private sector contribution to the circular economy | * Opportunity to test new entrepreneurial ideas within a live market place within a town centre location * Bringing together complimentary cultural and commercial partners that facilitates deeper business partnerships and community links * Drive community engagement and local charity awareness |

**Occupation of vacant unit**

Occupation will need some form of lease

1. short term lease for a defined period – no more than x weeks/months; of

2. a tenancy at will which is a rolling arrangement which can be terminated by either party on notice (the notice period could set the minimum term length ie:one month; one week etc.).

Assuming the latter of the options above a draft generic document could circulated to the relevant landlord/their agents as a starting point for discussion.  It would then be for the landlords to finalise.

The role of agents will be key partners to assist understanding the position of absentee landlords.

Careful assessment is need of the list below and where responsibilities/commitments sit. These cannot be assumed to be passed onto the occupier as this would make the project unviable. Rent;

* + Rates;
  + BID payments;
  + Service charge (excluding utilities);
  + Building insurance costs;
  + Other outgoings of any sort (costs arising from statutory compliance of any sort);
  + Disrepair to the fabric of the unit unless caused by them;

An occupier would be liable for the following:

* + Costs of their own contents insurance and public liabilioty insurance for hosting the pop up – and levels should be agreed and be a pre-requisite of taking space (need to understand the type of insurance this would be);
  + Costs of consumption of services – to be invoiced by the landlord (meter readings taken at beginning and end of occupancy);
  + Keeping the unit clean (interior, windows (in and out));
  + Any damage caused to the unit;
  + Security in so far as obligations to lock the unit etc.;
  + Compliance/not breaching the prohibitions in the landlord’s buildings insurance.

We need to think Further assessment is needed on the following

* + Signage – how will the occupier advertise their occupation – Landlord will need to consent to this approach;
  + Might the landlord be concerned they won’t get paid the costs of the utilities – should there by some sort of upfront payment – could that be underwritten by “an organisation” on the basis that the occupier may not have the funds at the outset?
* Occupier’s fit out of the unit – are they going to be hanging thingshow is that going to be made good?  Do they want to paint – should there be a reinstatement obligation to the original colour etc?;
* Permitted use
* Planning restrictions

**Key Risks & constraints & Project Control**

**To add**

**Funding Model**

Alongside any grants from Government that the project is in a position to bid for, an outcome for the pilot is to explore the viability of constructing a sustainable business model based on each individual pop up.

Potential Areas of income could include;

* Partnership funding
* Sponsorship Modelling
* Commercial ‘pop up’ rental
  + Retail Spaces
  + F&B Vendors
  + Business development
* Usage Hire
  + Hire out spaces (look at Peckham levels for rate examples)
  + Corporate Events in the Studio
  + Corporate Workshops in the Studio
  + Artist Studio Slots in Makerspace

**Review, Completion and Evaluation Criteria**

**Resources**

CERTF Lead Ian George

CBC Lead Tracey Crews (CBC project sponsor)

Cabinet portfolio lead Cllr Victoria Atherstone

CERTF Counter Culture Sub Group Joe Roberts/Antonia Shield

Pilot project landlord xxxxx

**Project Governance**

Core project team

Change controls – to be approved by project sponsor

6 weekly highlight reports to CERTF

Project status maintained on Clearview by project manger

Documents stored in CBC S drive location