



Executive Summary

# FROM TEMPORARY TO TRANSITIONAL Public Assets: Temporary Use

# FROM TEMPORARY TO TRANSITIONARY

## Public Assets: Temporary Use

This report was commissioned by West Yorkshire Combined Authority, funded through the One Public Estate programme and was undertaken by Creative Space Management and East Street Arts between January and May 2020. Following the lockdown imposed by the UK Government as a result of COVID-19, the report, although largely commissioned and completed pre-COVID-19, was adjusted to include recommendations that relate to the likely impact of severely curtailed trading for many businesses large and small in the town and city centres of the region.

Whilst we do not claim to have identified novel solutions, we recognise the virus will have a lasting impact on our whole country and particularly the urban centres. These places at the heart of our town centres and neighbourhoods are totemic. They reflect the essentially social nature of our lives and our desire to gather together, share experiences and weave connections with our communities.

We can anticipate that business closures will upend some of the places we have seen as the cornerstones of our town centres.

There will be a profoundly challenging period to which we will all have to adapt. Our centres will not return as they once were. Where transition was likely to have been a relatively slow, iterative process, the consequences of the pandemic will accelerate change. The short-term economic impact may be severe. Our urban centres will require new forms of pro-active interventions to help them adapt to this new reality. Accelerating new types of uses of vacant properties will be key to rebuilding confidence, footfall and the economy.

Temporary use is not merely a series of patched solutions to market failure and to structural industrial change (online retail). It has potential to be a much more ambitious and visionary exercise in re-engaging our communities with town centres. The actions, projects and initiatives that can be developed across West Yorkshire Combined Authority need to emphasise the importance of innovation if we are to attract new energy, talent and uses to failing locations. This issue, already tangible in many smaller town centres and high streets, now has an immediate urgency as we emerge from lock-down into a post-COVID-19 recession.

To manage the painful transition to a less socially distanced public life, new responses to the blank canvases appearing on our high streets will be required. We will need to be brave and imaginative about how we envisage and plan for this and, vitally, we need to increase the capacity of authorities so that they can be fleet of foot in responding to impact of economic shock on our town centres.

We hope that this report is one starting point for such a transition and offers some pointers as to how change can be implemented at city region level. Our approach is positive and constructive. We believe that in spite of the personal tragedies endured by many and the deep disruption to our perceptions of normality, there are opportunities to adopt new perspectives that tackle, for some places, a likely interruption in our civic lives and, for others, a systematic and progressive decline that was in evidence long before COVID-19.

As Ali Madanipour states at the end of his book, *Cities in Time*, we consider temporary space to be a stepping-stone rather than a stopgap until an imagined return to the status quo. As we start to rebuild our economy and our communities following the impact of the pandemic, we will need to embrace temporary use as part of a journey towards new and different long-term uses of buildings and land. What have been thought of as temporary uses can perhaps be better described as transitionary uses in these changed circumstances. It is our job to help facilitate and drive this transition.

*"A temporary state, therefore, may become a stepping-stone rather than a stopgap, going beyond coping with crisis and thinking about what happens next. It offers a sphere of possibility in which the space offers the widest range of possible new things that can happen, as it has the fewest limits. In a sense, it is like an open field in which many activities can take place, which makes it ambivalent, as it can be taken into any direction by the interplay of power social and economic forces. A temporary activity may act as a transformative medium, helping to create new, or use existing gaps in an active capacity. It can be used as a catalyst for change, facilitating experimentation, innovation or animation...."*

Ali Madanipour – *Cities in Time*

The report's recommendations address three questions:

- *What needs considering before temporary use?*
- *How should temporary use projects be delivered?*
- *How can we aggregate resources to maximise benefit and impact?*

## A What needs considering before temporary use?

- Be clear about the specific outcomes your local authority wants to achieve. For example, do you wish to provide enhanced spatial capacity for safely distanced food and beverage consumption? Or are you trying to address long term retail over-capacity, changing functions and diversifying uses?
- What questions are you asking about your urban centres and places? In some cases, the most successful temporary projects are those that ask questions rather than attempting to provide solutions. To what extent is your project exploring or asking questions? Or does it assume a solution? Create opportunities for urban experimentation and innovation.
- Define how / if what is being proposed fits in to your longer-term plan for the wider area. Does the use complement wider plans for the neighbourhood, town centre, or high street? Is it designed to support existing businesses and traders or is it intended to change reputations and build a new market or cluster in that location, for example by focusing more on local and independent businesses?
- Collaborate with other stakeholders who want to achieve the same outcome. To what degree have you involved other partners and stakeholders in your plans where they have the same or overlapping agendas?



*The Festival of the Moon, featuring a seven metre Luke Jerram moon in Wakefield's former market hall*

## B How should temporary use projects be delivered?

- v) Be realistic about the project delivery and management requirements. Do you have the capacity and resource to deliver the project in house with your own team? Will you focus capacity on bidding for internal and external resources and then appoint some or all the team necessary to deliver a successful project?
- vi) Harness existing community, cultural, social or independent business and organisations as potential routes for delivery. Are there local organisations with the motivation and capacity to take on temporary use projects? Have you considered how they could contribute to project delivery? Sometimes there is a lot of interest and demand to get involved but coordinating and managing this is the key challenge. Alternatively, where there appears to be little interest and few local organisations able to contribute, how will you stimulate engagement or find ways to attract new participants?
- vii) Recognise the challenges to small organisations. Acknowledge the extent of risk and sweat equity that may be required for relatively uncertain or short-term projects. The input required for small organisations can be considerable, involving many weeks of work as part of the 'benefit' of obtaining cheap space to use for a project. Do the organisations you are working with understand the extent of the commitment and the associated risks? How can you help them to manage and reduce those risks?
- viii) Make use of existing resources. Make use of templates for legal agreements or adapt them to establish new ones that facilitate access to enable participation and activity. What other resources can you use that have already been created? Share knowledge with and use your network of colleagues across West Yorkshire.
- ix) Encourage diversification. Exploring the diversification of functions in town centres will be part of a journey for building a new critical mass of multiple layers of activity and audience in town and urban centres. These multiple layers may, depending on the qualities of each place, have a very different focus, differentiated by the people and businesses of those communities. Some may focus on arts and culture, others on health and wellbeing but all will involve increased residential, live/work and changing types of businesses choosing to work, meet and connect in our urban centres.
- x) Consider using specialist organisations with relevant know-how and experience. Specialist organisations can help authorities accelerate temporary use, bringing capacity, resources and motivation to bear on mobilising projects on identified properties.

## C How can we aggregate resources to maximise benefit and impact?

- xi)* Promote the opportunities for temporary use. Develop an accessible, public-facing database of locations and opportunities for temporary use projects across the West Yorkshire.
- xii)* Stimulate networks to share knowledge and skills. Develop and coordinate a light-touch regional network of local authority officers (across economic development, property, culture) actively interested or involved in Temporary Use projects. Could the group record and develop best practice? Can officers aggregate know-how to explore ways to tackle specific challenging locations or recommend practices/organisations that have a track record of working in this specialist area?
- xiii)* Consider developing a more ambitious approach to temporary and long-term activation projects across West Yorkshire. Is there a need for a more strategic, aggregated approach whereby a West Yorkshire team is tasked to activate specific problem sites in multiple locations, developing a clear pipeline of opportunities identified by local authorities? The team would work closely with local authority officers to accelerate responses to the post COVID-19 economy, identifying new ways to access resources, generate revenue and diversify functions in our urban centres.
- xiv)* Secure new funding to act as a catalyst for investment in new approaches. West Yorkshire Combined Authority should consider making a second stage bid to One Public Estate to encourage acceleration of initiatives across town centres (particularly those smaller ones most likely to be badly affected by COVID-19 and the ensuing recession). This will actively support a pipeline of potential projects; undertake applied feasibility studies on real examples; access and distribute pump-priming resources to encourage private sector investment and invest in sharing know-how and expertise to convert this into tangible projects and initiatives across the city region.



34 Boar Lane, Artist Pod Residency by East Street Arts



*Leeds Print Workshop, Vicar Lane by East Street Arts*

- xv)** Anticipate requirements for business support. Consider the appropriate ways to deliver extra post-COVID-19 business support and know-how that will be required by arts, cultural, voluntary sector businesses wishing to expand into both small and larger urban centres. As noted in this report, there has been an acceleration in the rate of arts-related start-ups in the most recent year whilst professional services start-up growth has slowed. Business support for arts-related start-ups can contribute to filling some of the gaps in our town centres.
- xvi)** Establish pilot projects for repurposing larger spaces. Explore interim uses for safe distanced food and beverage sales by existing businesses so that they are able to operate in public realm and urban centres in the near future. Also, consider options for stimulating the market for ready-made modular systems or custom-built DIY structures that can be adapted for large empty stores or open plan office buildings. Perhaps consider a 'rapid-repurposing' live demonstration project to illustrate viability and impact in a West Yorkshire urban centre.
- xvii)** Upwards advocacy. Make the case for attracting central government resources for local authorities to attract pump-priming investment to deliver revised local plans. This should enable local authorities to undertake exemplar projects in their areas, stimulating the private sector and other public sector stakeholders to play a role in diversifying and developing both proven and innovative approaches in town centres and places across West Yorkshire Combined Authority.
- xviii)** New perspectives and new vocabulary. As Ali Madanipour concludes in his book, *Cities in Time*, temporary space needs to be understood as a stepping-stone rather than a stopgap until an imagined return to what was once the status quo. As we start to rebuild our economy and the places at the heart of our communities, we will need to transition towards new and different long-term uses of buildings and land. It is our job not just to get people and businesses back into our urban centres, but to help facilitate and drive this transition from an old model to something more adaptable, more sustainable, more in tune with our environment and with the increasing users and residents close to and within our towns and cities. These transitional uses are no longer simply temporary, they offer potential for a rapid response to tackling long-term change.