




Asset
Transfer
Unit

Inspiring people,
transforming places



Making Buildings Work for Your Community: *Design, Refurbishment and Retrofit*

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*Irena Bauman on the
power of design to
transform places*

All buildings provide shelter from the outside elements they are an additional skin over the clothing we wear and as such offer us further protection from the discomforts of the weather.

But good buildings with well designed spaces made fit for their purpose can do much more than just shelter us they can exalt, delight, enable, cuddle, inspire and make us feel happy.

Good design has a positive impact on every person, every day, all the time. It improves their mental and physical health and reduces opportunity for crime. It also enhances community cohesion, helps to deliver better community activities and services, enhances the

value of the building, and by doing so helps to reverse social and economic decline.

The value of good design is even more tangible when the design is developed with the engagement of the users in the case of community buildings, with the members of that particular community.

The process of creativity, of decision making, of learning about how buildings can be shaped is empowering. The users can make a significant contribution to improving the design of the building through their understanding of the community's needs, their preferences, priorities and habits. Such a process is likely to secure a better and more sustainable design and foster a sense of civic pride and a sense of identity for the participants

and for the community as a whole.

Good design represents great value for money and makes us happy bad design costs a great deal of money and contributes to loss of well being.

The difference between good and bad design is not a question of money but rather of care, of creativity, of users commitment and most of all of civic pride.

Each community can transform the quality of their lives through maximising the opportunities offered to secure nothing less but the best design for their civic buildings.

\ The Glass-House Community Led Design

The Glass-House Community Led Design was asked by the Asset Transfer Unit to explore the impact of design decisions on community building refurbishment, and to produce a publication for groups embarking on refurbishing a building for community use as part of an asset transfer project. This idea emerged following joint research and discussion about the importance of raising awareness of the impact that design decisions made during a refurbishment can have on the long-term success and sustainability of a community building.

This is a not comprehensive guide to refurbishing a building. It offers a brief introduction to the design process and practical advice on how to ensure that your building can be the best possible facility for your community. We have drawn on our experiences of supporting community led building projects and that of community organisations that have refurbished community facilities. We

have also benefitted from the considerable experience and expertise of the architects at Wright and Wright.

Design is a blending together of form, function and feelings. A holistic and comprehensive design for your building refurbishment will be a powerful tool.

Whatever the scale of the physical changes or additions to be made to your building, the design decisions you make will have an impact on the use, management and maintenance of the building. They will impact on the long-term sustainability of your building and of the organisations, activities and services that it houses. A well planned participatory design process can help ensure that your building will be a place where people want to meet, work, study and play.

Refurbishing a building is a real opportunity to think not only about what is currently wrong with the building, but about what the building could be for the future.

Refurbishment need not be simply a series of repairs, but an opportunity to transform a building into a place that supports and enhances the lives of the people in it and around it. In short, it is important to ensure that the building becomes a real asset to the community.

This publication aims to help raise awareness of the power of design to:

- Respond to local needs and aspirations.
- Create accessible and inspiring places where people want to be.
- Support and enhance your business plan and create opportunities for growth in the future.
- Create new opportunities for enterprise, outreach and partnership working.
- Create places that are more easily managed and maintained and that are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.

We are grateful to a number of community organisations

that have generously shared the successes and shortcomings of their refurbishment projects in order to help you approach your project with your eyes wide open. A list of these projects is at the back of this publication, and case studies of their projects are available on the Asset Transfer Unit website (www.atu.org.uk).

On the following pages, you will find some practical examples of the way different projects have approached making changes to their buildings, as well as some recommendations of things to consider before you start your project. This is not a comprehensive how to guide. Every building and community is different, and there is no one solution for all. It is our hope that this brief glimpse into the impact of design decisions will help you take charge of your projects, build confidence in your own expertise and point you in the direction of resources and organisations that can help you get the most out of your refurbishment.





GRANARY THEATRE

Architects come in many different shapes and sizes; the key is to select a practice on the basis of a good fit with your group and with a shared passion to make great spaces. No doubt you will be able to describe to them what you want, but how will these relationships develop and designs emerge?

Drawings and models are the typical tools of the trade for communication; construction terminology and fundraising jargon also need to be learnt and embraced. Once these skills have been embraced the project can be steered in the direction you want to take it.

Successful projects require engagement, questioning and participation from the client.

Working with an existing building opens up wonderful opportunities to re-imagine spaces and awaken new possibilities. The building will need to be surveyed, opened up and understood, to establish the conditions that you can build from. A clear brief and an open dialogue will allow you to exploit the potential uses of your building. You will need to think carefully about what the core activities to be accommodated are and how your group might change and grow with the new building. As the design develops, user groups should feel open to participate in the design process.

This booklet demonstrates how delight should permeate every aspect of the design. The ambition to do something extraordinary

should not be restrained by practicalities. Simple questions can structure your discussions with your architect: How much natural light will enter the space? What is the view and how will I enter? How high and wide will the spaces feel? What are the textures, colours and finishes that will bring delight?

There is a tendency for clients to be sceptical about using new green technologies if they appear costly or difficult to operate. A sustainable approach will in fact help you to reduce whole life costs of the building and will radiate a positive ethos of energy saving. You should feel confident to discuss with your architect how these ideas can be integrated into the design and how easy they will be to control and use.

Context

- How does the building sit within the physical and social context?
- Does the building and open space around it fit within its physical surroundings?
- Does the use of the building complement other amenities and services in the area?
- Do you rely on passing trade for business is the building in a good place for this?

A Burslem School of Art Trust
The Burslem School of Art refurbishment, and subsequent re-use, has been a catalyst for the whole street. The street has changed from retail usage to spaces used by creative and other businesses – it is bringing life back in a different way.

B The Priory Centre
As well as The Priory Centre being a grade one listed building, which restricts changes that can be made to it, the group was also restricted by the lack of space surrounding the building.

C Tremayne Hall
Tremayne Hall sits right in the heart of the village, slightly set back from the high street. The Mylor Local History Group house their archive in the building and played a vital role in attracting funding for the refurbishment. Memories and ties to a place's history can play an important role in bringing people together.







A



B



C



- Does your building have a clear identity?
- Is it clear what your building is and who it is for?
- Is there a clear aesthetic and design language for the building?
- Does the building use branding (through signage, symbols)?

Identity

A The Priory Centre

The Priory has created a visually striking logo. It has also made a feature of the old school coat hooks, reminding people of some of the historical uses of the building.

B Elsie Whiteley Innovation Centre

The beautiful blending of the old building materials, with a modern, minimalist aesthetic, creates a unique and effective identity. Tenants feel proud and confident inviting clients to the building.

C Old Lambeth Walk

The new mews at the rear of Old Lambeth Walk is in keeping with the nature of the creative businesses housed here.

Connectivity/legibility

- Is it clear where people should go when they get to your building?
- Is movement within the building practical and easy to navigate (with and without signs)?
- How well do internal spaces connect or relate to each other? Can you see one space from another, or do you get great views?

A Burslem School of Art
The feel of the entrance/reception of your building, and clarity of where to go from there, can have a big impact on the user. The first internal space at Burslem School of Art feels light and welcoming, and you are drawn into the atrium, but it is not apparent where you should go once there. The tenants of the building felt it was very clear, but it is not necessarily to a newcomer. There is no signage or identity for the individual organisations within the rooms. The atrium gives no clue to the hive of activity behind the walls.

B St Paul's
Use of glass and transparency of materials between spaces helps to orientate you throughout the St Paul's Church and fosters a culture of inclusion and equality of and between services. It makes it welcoming and easy to find your way around.

C The Priory
An example of clear signs that help people get around.

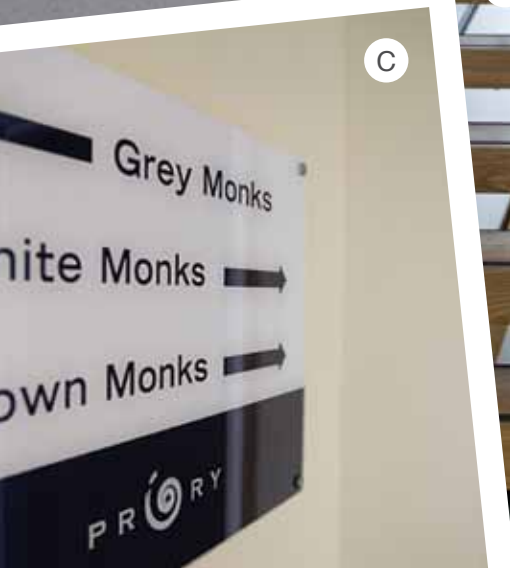




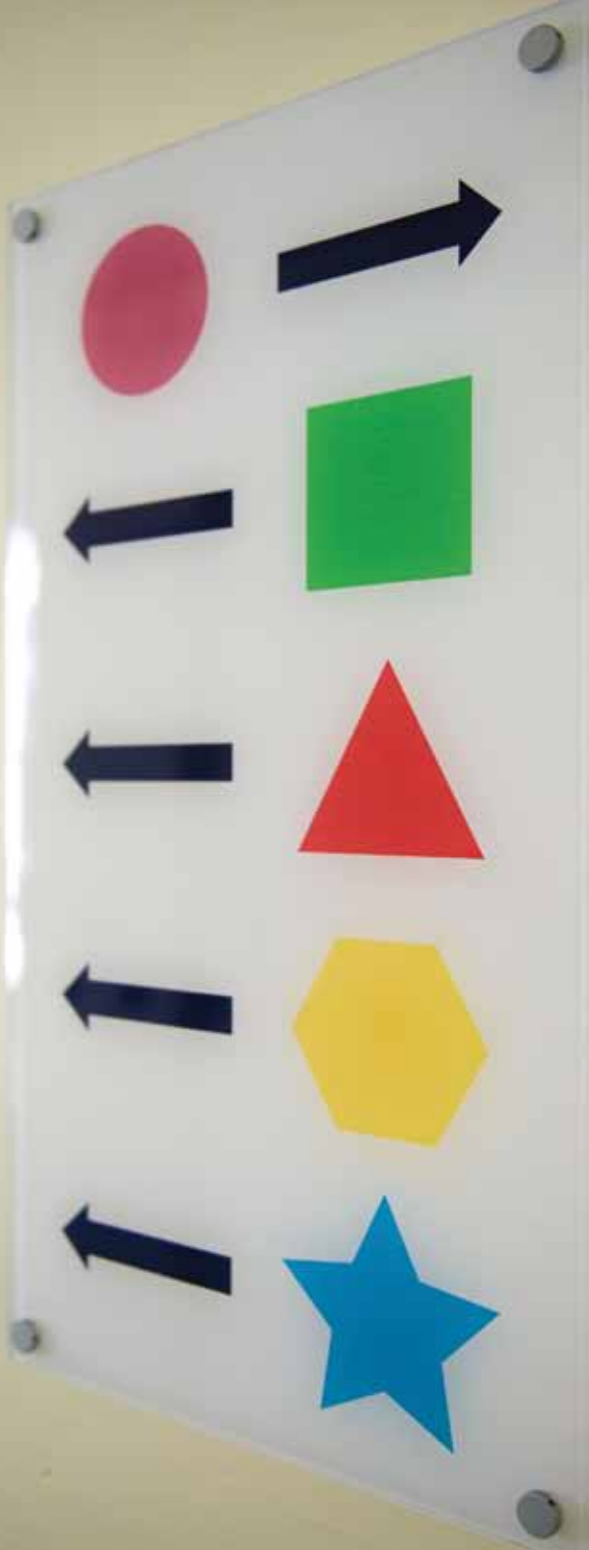
A



B



C



A



B



C



- Can people get there easily?
- Can people enter and move around easily?
- Are there any physical barriers to those with mobility limitations, with physical or learning differences, with buggies and small children?
- Has the refurbishment made it possible for people who had not previously been able to access the building to use it?

A The Priory Centre

The use of diagrammatic signage makes the building easy to negotiate for those who find written signs difficult to understand.

B Acacia Centre

A specially designed changing room for people with disabilities is a thoughtful and attractive feature at the Acacia Centre. It is of particular interest for a number of groups locally.

C Burslem School of Art

The front steps at the entrance were reduced from 3 to 1, with one side of the step transformed into a ramp. They also raised the pavement outside the building to bring it up to the first step. Refurbishment addressed non-compliance with DDA and fire regulations using an external circulation tower, which was plugged on the back of the building. This provided means of escape, a lift and accessible toilets.

Curtains and soft boards in the front meeting room have helped to create an acoustically more comfortable space. The boards also double as pin-up boards.

Flexibility

- Can the internal and external spaces be used in a number of ways for different user groups and needs?
- Can the spaces be changed temporarily (e.g. with movable walls)?
- Is there potential to change spaces/uses quite easily in the future?
- Has the refurbishment made it possible to support a broader spectrum of user groups?

A Burslem School of Art
Soundproof room dividers are successfully used to divide a larger room into two smaller ones.

At many centres, large spaces have been converted to smaller ones, according to the tenant need, through partition walls that can be removed again.

B Tremayne Hall
The entrance is used as a temporary reception area for the luncheon club members to register.

C Manningham Mills Community Centre
The folding computer desks allow for the IT room to be used as a training room for other subjects and groups.









Energy, water, waste management etc

- Have materials or systems been selected and used to lower the use of water, energy and other resources?
- How effectively does the building use or even store energy? Does it create any energy?
 - Is the building insulated effectively?
 - Are there good waste management and recycling systems?

A Old Lambeth Walk

Old Lambeth Walk Development Trust were really concerned that as many of the features and materials from the original terrace as possible should be retained and re-used, despite it being so dilapidated when refurbishment started.

B St Paul's

St Paul's Church uses natural light effectively throughout all parts of the building. Internal windows carry that light from one space to another. The suspended upper floors allow light to reach the nave as well as the new rooms.

C Acacia Centre

The Acacia Centre has a comprehensive strategy for resource conservation, reduction of use of resources, recycling and energy production. Not only is the building extremely well insulated and producing its own geo-thermal electricity, but they also collect grey water for use in toilet cisterns and have waterless urinals in the men's toilets.

Management & maintenance

- Is the building easy to manage (e.g. are the spaces right for your needs, is there adequate storage, is the internal climate easily controlled and changed?)
- Is the building easy to maintain (e.g. easy to clean, handling the wear and tear of daily use)?

A Elsie Whiteley Innovation Centre

When smokers took over an internal courtyard, the management decided to reclaim it and turn it into a sculpture garden for all to enjoy.

B Tremayne Hall

Tremayne Hall have an ingenious and easy to use storage solution for packing chairs away under the stage. There are two sets – one for children and one for larger people.

C Acacia Centre

The heating and environmental controls at the Acacia Centre are simple to use, and to learn. The temperature in the big hall can be changed within 15 minutes to suit the needs of different groups.





A



C



B





Physical and emotional

- Do people feel safe approaching and inside the building?
- Can the building be secured effectively when not in use?
- Can some distinct areas be locked down at certain times of the day or night?

Security

A Pelton Fell

The reception and café area at Pelton Fell has a view out over the children's playground and good oversight of internal circulation in the centre.

B The Priory Centre

At the Priory there is no exterior security on the new entrance, but inside, there is a shutter at the back of the reception allowing physical security when the building is not in use.

C Acacia Centre

At the Acacia Centre, where vandalism had been an issue before the refurbishment, the design managed to elegantly address security. The walls are designed to be smooth, making them hard to get a purchase for climbing, and the rainwater pipes are internal. The height to the roof is more than a single jump, and the clean and cared for appearance does not invite vandalism.

Enterprise

- Does the building meet the needs identified in the business plan?
- Has the design of the building / refurbishment created new opportunities for enterprise within the facility?
- Has the refurbished building retained old user groups?
- Is the refurbished building attracting new user groups?

All the buildings we visited have become vibrant new centres for a rich variety of individuals, groups and businesses. Some house small businesses, providing start up opportunities for local entrepreneurs, others operate their own successful caf  s. Some rent out space to dance and other classes and run lunch clubs for local people. Young, old and people of differing communities have new local facilities.

Often there has been a renewed link between local schools, the users of the centre and local residents. The refurbishment designs have enabled them to work so much more effectively in their chosen field. The quality of the designs and refurbishments gives people a new pride in their local area.









- Is the building pleasing to look at?
- Do people feel comfortable, exhilarated, inspired by the space?

Delight



Top tips from the groups

People

Work with the community; local people will respond well to seeing good use of a building.

Use and appreciate what you've got both in terms of the history of the building and your human resources.

Build capacity get a team around you with different experiences and perspectives early on so that all bases are covered throughout the project.

Go and visit similar existing buildings and talk to people who've been through the process, learn from examples and experience.

Engage with potential users as early as possible this is part of having a solid argument for your funders so that you can convince them of your vision.

Get an architect who is sensitive to your project aims; and someone who will project manage.

Be a robust client the relationship with the architect should work two ways. Always question things you don't understand.

Maintain a good relationship with all partners local people, local authorities, funding bodies, board members and other local organisations. Value the experience of your partners and listen to their advice.

Process

Be really clear about what you want to achieve. Have a clear vision.

Develop a brief with your partners and users and make sure that your desires and needs are voiced in the brief.

Design

Don't underestimate the need for storage.

Sometimes a bespoke finish can solve a problem.

Make sure fittings can be maintained and replaced.

Where are your toilets placed? Who will need to use them and when?

Natural ventilation affects temperature and air quality. Bear this in mind when planning for the placement of windows, doors and ventilation systems.





A *DDA compliance can sometimes conflict with children's safety* this door release button on the front door is low enough for a young child to operate and run outside.

B *People will come up with their own solutions if it's not built into the design.*

C **D** *DDA compliance needn't compromise the look and feel of a building.*

E *Bobbly lino and other materials can be noisy to push deliveries across if people are working nearby.*



E



1 Get to know the building

Do thorough research on the building what have the uses been over time and how has it changed physically?

- Understand the physical history of the building when was it built and how has it, and the building and spaces around, it changed over time? Track the physical changes to the building.
- Find out whether the building is listed, and if so, what grade?
- Understand how the building works (where are the structural walls, the services etc) to establish what can be changed or moved and what needs to stay the same.
- Find out what uses the building has had and who has managed it.
- Understand the social history of the building what does it mean to local people?
- Talk to the full range of people who are involved with the building (managers, staff, maintenance, user groups) in order to fully understand the way it works.
- Identify the existing elements of the building that are important to maintain (for historical, social or practical reasons) and which are very important to the building.

2 Get to know the area

Map out what else is in the area and the people who live, work, study and play there

- Map out the competing and complementary organisations and facilities in the area.
- Look at how your site relates physically to other facilities that your user groups may use.
- Look at how your site relates to public transport links, available parking etc.
- Gain an understanding of the make-up of your local population and explore the issues that matter to local people.
- Talk to local people about what they feel is missing in the area and what they would like to see brought in.



3 Develop a collective vision

Work with staff, user groups and local people to outline what you want the building to achieve and how you want it to feel

- Look at the issues that arise when using the current space and think about how the design of the new space can change behaviour and emotions.
- Think about how emotive reactions can affect the function of a building (e.g. Do people feel welcome and encouraged/interested to stay when they walk through the door? Do people feel safe in and around your building?)
- Take advantage of local knowledge, skills and networks to consider how the building can complement (and not duplicate) existing resources and support new collaboration, projects and user groups.
- Identify what you want to achieve with your building. It is important to identify your high-level objectives first and then find the design to suit that rather than just making do with spaces you have. Put the vision before the brief.

4 Get to know the area

Learn from other projects

- Visit other community buildings and get inspired by a range of architectural eras and styles.
- Speak to groups who have been through a refurbishment and learn from their experiences (both successes and failures).
- Learn about the stages of design, and the role of the various consultants.
- Seek independent advice on the potential for change to your building (e.g. which walls are load bearing and which can be moved).
- Feel confident in your knowledge of the building and your area as well as your aspirations.

Before you start

5 Develop your design brief alongside your business plan

- Build your brief based on activities and interactions.
- Make sure your brief considers the potential that the refurbishment brings, but also the limitations that your building could present.

- Build a management and maintenance plan into your business plan. You will make design decisions later on that can facilitate better management and design, but you will also need to consider the long term maintenance and longevity of the different aspects of your building.

- Be aware that your brief will evolve when you are working with your architect. What is vital in the first instance is to have absolute clarity about the existing building, the context, your vision, your objectives and how you want the building to feel. Do not try to solve the problems as that is your architect's job.

6 Make sure that the building is the right one for your project

- Is it in the right place, with the right links to transport, other activities etc?

- Can a refurbishment lead to the creation of spaces that work for your group, local people and all the activities outlined in your business plan?
- Can the refurbished building be managed

and maintained by your group/partnership, or will you require additional support? If so, you will need to think that through and find solutions before you go ahead with the project.



7 Get the right professional for you

- Set up a clear selection process with your selection criteria.
- Develop a clear description of what you are looking for and what you hope to achieve.
- Interview the strongest candidates.
- Choose the person/team you feel you can work with. While the presentation and images architects present are important, it is essential that you can develop a collaborative rapport

with the architects you choose. Design is an iterative process, and you will need to be able to get on with and get the most out of the professional you work with.



The Architecture Centre Network is a network of centres that give information on events and activities related to architecture throughout the UK. See this website for publications on good design, public spaces, community needs and play. www.architecturecentre.net

The Architectural Heritage Fund is a registered charity that promotes the conservation of historic buildings in the UK. It does this by providing advice, information and financial assistance in the form of grants and low interest working capital loans for projects undertaken by building preservation trusts (BPTs) and other charities throughout the UK. www.ahfund.org.uk

Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE) has been the leading authority and resource in the UK, for over 30 years, on inclusive design and access to the built environment for disabled and older people. www.cae.org.uk

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) is the government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space. Works with architects, designers, developers and clients, offering them guidance that will shape lives. Website provides a wide range of case studies and publications relating to buildings and open space. www.cabe.org.uk/

Community Planning provides an overview of the new methods of community planning. An essential starting point for everyone concerned with community planning the website provides easily accessible how-to-do-it best practice information of international scope and relevance. www.communityplanning.net

The Design Quality Indicator
A method of evaluating the design and construction of new buildings and the refurbishment of existing buildings. If you are building or refurbishing, you can pay

to use the Design Quality Indicator. www.dqi.org.uk

English Heritage provides advice and guidance on historic and listed buildings and their care and protection from planning to climate change and regeneration. Much of this work is informed by their extensive research programme and is regularly updated so that it reflects the latest issues facing the heritage sector. www.english-heritage.org.uk

Ethical Property Foundation offers independent, ethical advice and training to help charities and voluntary groups rent, buy, let or manage their property. They also work with landlords and developers to help reduce the social and environmental impact of commercial property. www.ethicalproperty.org.uk

The Glass-House Community Led Design is a national charity that supports and encourages better working partnerships

between communities and professionals who are working together to improve the quality of a neighbourhood. The Glass-House supports a community led design process that ensures regeneration is happening with and for, not to local people. Has further resource links at:
www.theglasshouse.org.uk

Planning Aid provides free, independent and professional town planning advice and support to communities and individuals who cannot afford to pay consultant fees. Visit the website to find out about their services, whether you qualify for Planning Aid assistance and how to contact Planning Aid in your area.
www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Planning Portal: the government's online planning and building regulations resource for England and Wales. Use the site to learn about planning and building regulations, apply for planning permission, find out about developments

near you and research government policy.
www.planningportal.gov.uk

RIBA
The website of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Contains news and information on exhibitions and events as well as a directory of architecture practices.
www.architecture.com

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BRE Trust is a charitable company whose objectives are, through research and education, to advance knowledge, innovation and communication in all matters concerning the built environment for public benefit.
www.bre.co.uk

Carbon Trust provides specialist support to business and the public sector to help cut carbon emissions, save energy and commercialise low carbon technologies.
www.carbontrust.co.uk

Energy Saving Trust: Green Communities is a programme from the Energy Saving Trust that aims to support, facilitate and promote community based energy projects.
www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

Environment Agency: public body which aims to protect and improve the environment and to promote sustainable development. The Environment Agency plays a central role in delivering the environmental priorities of central government and the Welsh Assembly. www.environment-agency.gov.uk

International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is an independent, non-profit organisation which promotes sustainable patterns of world development through collaborative research, policy studies, consensus building and public information. Participatory Learning and Action – a Trainer's Guide, is available from the IIED.
www.iied.org

Groups

(You can view case studies on all the buildings visited on the ATU website: www.atu.org.uk)

All Saints Action Network

(ASAN) is a community based charitable company operating as a development trust in the All Saints area of Wolverhampton. The refurbishment of the former All Saints School building created The Workspace, completed in October 2008.

The Tremayne Hall

Management Committee

is a group of volunteers who have enabled the restoration of Tremayne Hall, in Mylor Bridge, Cornwall. The building was officially re-opened in 2007.

St. Paul's Church in Bow, London, is governed by the registered charity Old Ford Parochial Church Council (PCC), and is part of the Church of England. Originally built in 1878, the restored and refurbished building was re-opened in May 2004.

Pelton Fell Community

Partnership, based in Chester-le-Street, Durham, is a grass roots project established in 2009. They manage the new Brockwell Centre.

The Old Lambeth Walk Development Trust

(OLWDT) was formed, in 1996, as an action group out of the Old Lambeth Walk Residents Association, in order to fight the proposed demolition of a terrace that formed the last remnant of the world famous south London street. Their efforts have helped bring the buildings back into use through preserving the existing businesses, creating additional workspace and providing affordable housing.

Manningham Mills Community Association

(MMCA) is a company and a registered charity. It was formed by a group of local residents in Bradford, Yorkshire, in 1995, to prevent the dereliction and destruction of Lister's Mill (Manningham Mills) in the

centre of Manningham, and to create a community space for the benefit of local residents. The new Manningham Mills Community Centre, located in the mill, opened in 2007.

Established in 2001, Great Yarmouth Community

Trust is a community anchor organisation, delivering a range of services to residents in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk. The Priory Centre is a grade 1 listed building and was originally a 14th century Guest Hall built as part of the Benedictine Priory. The first phase of refurbishment was completed in November 2009.

Managed by Halifax Opportunities Trust,

a social enterprise and registered charity, the Elsie Whiteley Innovation Centre (EWIC) provides office space designed to meet the needs of creative, digital and innovation businesses in Halifax, Yorkshire. The newly refurbished Centre was opened in 2007.

The Burslem School of Art Trust is a company limited by guarantee with charitable aims based at the Burslem School of Art in Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent. Following years of dereliction, the Burslem School of Art building was refurbished and re-opened as a creative business centre in 2000.

The new Acacia Centre, in Kirby-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, has transformed what was once a run down and vandalised 70s bunker into a much loved, successful and eco-friendly building. **Ashfield Council**, the **Acacia Centre Management Committee** and the **Community Radio group**, led the refurbishment process and the Centre was re-opened in 2009.

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