

MakeSpace Arts & Well-Being CIC Report for 2024/25

Lease negotiations continue, albeit slowly. We organised a #SaveEBW campaign in May 2024 in the face of a cessation of engagement from Shropshire Council. Lease discussions were successfully restarted after an 80+ strong public meeting and strong support for a petition, which was read out in Council.

Shropshire Council eventually refused our application for the Community Asset Transfer of the building, due to the presence of small businesses, i.e. our resident artists. We have accepted that we will be offered a commercial lease with rent, but at the time of writing we are still negotiating with the embattled Council over the final details of the Heads of Terms of a long tenancy. As soon as we have agreed terms we can start to apply for capital grant funding of approx £1.5 million to refurbish the building.

Meanwhile MakeSpace CIC has a new director on board, Joey McGillott, who has our marketing portfolio. She was the driving force behind our #Save EBW campaign, and has vastly improved our social media presence and engagement, which reinforces our position as a much loved asset in the community. James Smith as building manager has overseen the day to day maintenance and utilities, including full fibre broadband recently connected

and a new noticeboard for posters. Jancis Vaughan continues as studio manager.

Studio Spaces:

With the departure of Tony Vettise (Studio 5) and Jean Mills (Studio 8), we were able to alter the Studio 7/8 space. The dividing wall was taken down to make one large Studio 7, which is now occupied by 4 new artists: Sue Challis (visual artist), Nick Boy (photographer and collage artist), Megan Ward (painter) and Caris Jackson (collage artist). The increase in room size and light, and a more open feel, are already contributing to a more vibrant atmosphere. Rasa Eggerton took on the annex space in Studio 6 for ceramics, and Felicia Dutton in Studio 2 was replaced by first Gaynor Gregory (painter), then Tristan Copeland (filmmaker) and then Natalie Perry (jeweller), so we are now 13. The dynamic is positive, with ideas and collaborative projects emerging.

Our waiting list is healthy, and was used to fill the newly re-formed Studio 7.

Community Spaces:

Hall bookings and footfall have increased in the year to March 2025, with an annual total of 477 bookings and a footfall of 5000. Regular users are up from 7 to 13: Life

drawing, Well-being Art Group sessions, portrait painting, landscape painting, Guild of Enamellers' workshops, iconography courses, Salsa dance classes, mosaic and collage workshops, 2 band rehearsals, a DJ'ed vinyl dance party and punk gigs. The halls have also been booked by community groups for occasional meetings, etc.

Unfortunately in Oct 2024 a piece of upper hall ceiling fell down - no-one injured - which led to the closure of the upper hall. All groups were moved downstairs, with minimal clashes. The lower hall has suited most groups better due to its intimate size and more effective heating, but larger groups are holding on in hope of more space soon. Income however is down due to only having the smaller (cheaper) hall along with rising utility bills.

The Loft day space has been used regularly by our much-valued volunteer James Fitzpatrick, and several others over the year.

The **Viewing Deck** at the Market Hall has not proved popular, and we will be looking for an alternative exhibition space.

Online:

Our Instagram @ravenstudios.shrewsbury has consistently maintained over 2,000 followers (2,342 at the time of writing) and we aim to reach 3,000 next year. We have ceased using the @english_bridge_shrewsbury account in preparation for a rebrand in 2025, for which we have acquired £3,500 grant income and which will replace the English Bridge Workshop and Raven Studios projects.

The free Zoom **Social Studios** group has a steady core of 6, with 4 participants based outside Shrewsbury. Current participants have come to value the sessions very highly as a source of both inspiration and discipline. Plans are afoot for a group show at the Gateway Gallery.

Events:

The range of live music events here has increased, with a number of one-off gig bookings on top of the regular post-punk slot. The DJ'ed community disco with bar has dropped down to every two months in order to ensure sufficient turnout to support the bar.

Shrewsbury Open Studios hosted over 40 participating artists for 4 successful Open Studios weekends, with some of those taking part in the community halls; plans for 2025 are for two Open Studios weekends in June and November only, with another wider event for 2026..

Other projects:

English Bridge 40th anniversary: £1,000 has been granted by VAN for this project, with events and exhibitions planned to showcase 40 years of art at our premises.

Another bid for £8,000 has been made to the Arts Council for workshops for all ages, legacy documentation through digital and physical archives and community partnerships with Belle Vue Festival and the Hive.

Shropshire Artscape was shared this year with Vibrant Shropshire (the Council's organisation for supporting local culture), and there have been regular enquiries about additions. It is particularly useful for artists who are more rurally situated.

A further meeting of the **Shropshire Visual Art Forum** took place in September, with another in the diary for early April. We hope to continue enabling a sense of community amongst our art organisations and artists.

Our free downloadable **Art Plan** activity packs are still available, ideal for school holidays.

Studio Future:

We believe we have found the ideal home for a vibrant and exciting grass roots arts hub for Shrewsbury - our

future now depends largely on securing a long term lease on the building, and funding, as without major refurbishment, our time here at the English Bridge Workshop will be limited.

We are still confident that this will come about, and have continued to have success with a number of small grant applications. We are very grateful to Shrewsbury Town Council (new side gate), Veolia (planters and a compost bin), Shrewsbury Summer Season (SYOS), Visual Art Network (SYOS, EBW40th), The Midcounties Co-op (rebrand), Shrewsbury BID (rebrand).

Jancis Vaughan

26/03/25