

Mushroom Works Studios: need a studio? Buying a building and setting up viable, affordable studio space for yourself and others.

The studios

Mushroom Works is an artist-led gallery and studio space in Newcastle upon Tyne housing a diverse range of creative practitioners. The converted warehouse has 12 individual studios and is located in the Ouseburn Valley, a hotspot for creative talent and industry in the city.

Mushroom Works is a Community Interest Company [CIC] which supports artists and creative industry practitioners by offering affordable studio rents and supporting activities which benefit them and their professional practice.



The project

When Nick James returned to Newcastle after completing his studies in Derby, he struggled to find a suitable studio space for his furniture design business. Waiting lists for existing studios in the region were long and the environment, space or locations were not suitable for his practice. While undertaking a business course, Nick discovered like-minded creative individuals in the same situation. Not wanting to work in isolation, Nick took matters into his own hands.

Key issues

Finding a suitable location – In 2004, buildings in the Ouseburn Valley were still relatively cheap. Nick found the Mushroom Works in early 2004 and initially dismissed it as too big. The site sat empty for six months. However, as artists heard of Nick's project by word of mouth and started contacting him looking for space, the 650 square metres site (while still daunting) became a viable proposition.

Funding – Being a sole trader enabled Nick to move the initial Mushroom Works project along quickly, but limited his avenues of funding. By making Mushroom Works a Community Interest Company Nick was able to apply for funding to undertake the development of the Brickwork Studios and future projects.

Timeline

- Early 2004** With the support of Business Link Tyne and Wear, Nick undertook a feasibility study looking at the need for facilities of over 100 artists. The feasibility study formed the basis of a business plan for the studio project.
- Early 2004** Yorkshire Bank approached and agreed to provide a mortgage to Nick to purchase a disused warehouse as a sole trader.
- June 2004** Purchase of the Mushroom Works warehouse completed.
- Sept 2004** Pre-opening event held to promote the studios. All studio spaces had signed tenants one week after pre-opening event.
- Nov 2004** Nick's application for funding from Arts Council North East (ACE) (reinforced by the signed tenants) was granted. This unlocked funding from Newcastle City Council.
- Nov 2004** 12 week build began.
- Jan 2005** Mushroom Studios opened to the public, creative practitioners moved in.

- Mid 2006** Within 18 months of opening the Mushroom Works, there was still further demand for studio space, with over 30 artists on a waiting list. Nick began to look for a new studio site and found another vacant warehouse, not yet on the market, close by the Mushroom Works.
- Mid 2006** Nick approached Arts Council England and Newcastle City Council for help to source backing to develop the Brickwork Studios.
- Oct 2006** Purchase of the disused second building completed.
- Oct 2006** Mushroom Works became a Community Interest Company [CIC]
- Dec 2006** Pre-opening event held to promote the studios. All studio spaces were over-subscribed from day one.
- Dec 2006** Regional Development Agency [One North East] grant for full refurbishment of the Brickworks was approved.
- Jan 2007** 10 week build commenced.
- March 2007** The Brickwork Studios opened, creative practitioners moved in.

Top tips – what Nick learned

- **Be ambitious**
- **Build strong relationships with your local authorities and funding bodies.**
After the success of Mushroom Works, ACE and Newcastle City Council championed Nick's application to the Regional Development Agency [One North East] for funding to develop the Brickworks. Keep in regular contact with your funding bodies ensuring they are up to date with advances on your project to strengthen your application.
- **Big ideas from small conversations.**
The studio members are encouraged to meet daily for regular tea breaks to interact, support each other and exchange ideas.
- **Think about the bigger picture.**
The Mushroom Works and Brickworks studios have evolved from a simple yet vital concept of affordable studio spaces for local artists and creative industries into a cultural asset for the North East.

Future plans

Extension of Mushroom Works – Being so close to the city centre, Ouseburn Valley is experiencing major regeneration resulting in significant increases in property prices and rentals. Nick plans to extend the Mushroom Works to include affordable live/work residential spaces for artists by the end of 2008.



Fact file - Mushroom Works

Website: <http://www.mushroomworks.com/>
Established: 2005
Organisational structure: CIC
Freehold sites: 1
Studio units: 12
Studio members: 15
Meeting rooms for hire: 1
Gallery space: 1
Project space: 1
Open studio events: Annually
Gallery: Open the first weekend of every month

Fact file – Brickworks

Website: <http://www.brickworkstudios.com>
Established: 2007
Organisational structure: CIC
Freehold site: 1
Studio units: 12
Studio members: 22
Meeting rooms for hire: 1