

## **Wharf Chambers Co-operative Club – Mission Statement**

### *Overview*

The club has been formed to partner with Wharf Chambers Ltd IPS-registered workers co-operative to establish and run a not-for-profit, ethical, affordable and sustainable city-centre venue in Leeds with multiple uses.

In conjunction with the workers co-operative we aim to provide a diverse space for art, film, music and discussion that brings together people from the creative communities across Leeds and the region. In the daytime the workers co-operative will run a cafe, socialising and meeting space.

To compliment and sustain this activity, as well as to offer a well rounded program of events, in the evening the members' club will open a bar and host a broad variety of cultural events including live and pre-recorded music, theatre, film, and performance for our members and their guests.

Through this activity we hope to provide a much-desired creative hub that will foster and develop cutting edge and non-market-led artistic activity in the city.

### *Background and History*

The club was formed after having identified a lack of ethically run, affordable and inclusive cultural space in Leeds City Centre, informed by both personal experience and attendance at council instigated events such as the Framework for The Visual Arts in Leeds discussion event in March 2010.

As many of us had previously been visitors or members of The Common Place, we were familiar with building and its unrealised potential as a cutting-edge and socially-embedded space for Leeds' artistic and creative community. Whilst we recognised the potential of the previous use of the building in terms of its function as a welcoming, mixed-use space we also saw its shortcomings that were, in the main, organisational and aesthetic.

As a club we have sought to avoid similar pitfalls through refurbishment and by rejecting the volunteer run model, opting instead for a members club with a workers co-operative that manages the day-to-day running of the space. The workers co-op has been registered with IPS and received a development grant and business advice to ensure its stable and professional operation.

Over the last four months the workers co-op have been involved in extensive renovations of the building with help, support and advice from members of the club and individuals who were involved in The Common Place that are supportive of our plan to start afresh

with the building. This has involved restoring original features, improving facilities and generally making the space a brighter, cleaner, more comfortable environment.

We have held a handful of fundraising events including an after-show party for an exhibition opening, music events and an evening meal (all on temporary licenses) and attracted a broad audience from the creative communities in Leeds. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive from people who had visited the space (who have described it as ‘almost unrecognisable’) to new visitors who are happy there will be a ‘Berlin-style trendy café/bar to visit in that part of town.’

We also have written and vocal support from the local authority, especially from the Arts and Regeneration department (see the letter of support from senior officer James Hill) who recognise and understand the positive contribution that a not-for-profit cultural venue that upholds ideals of mutual responsibility, co-operation and collective innovation will bring to the city. When we are able to hold licensable events with more planning and greater flexibility we hope to build quickly on this encouraging beginning and build a range of activity that will realise the full potential and sustainability of the organisation.