

# AIRE <sup>ST</sup> WORKSHOPS

We are Aire Street Workshops - a multi-tenancy building owned by the Council and set up 30 years ago as the first working model of this nature in Leeds, to nurture SME's.

Run by LCVS, an independent, not-for-profit company set up in 1981 with finance from the Department of the Environment and Leeds City Council to provide small low cost office and manufacturing units, Aire Street Workshops comprises of 31 businesses, 11 female led, providing employment for over 150 people, 60% under the age of 25. We are a hotbed of new and small businesses nurtured within our own, mainly younger community.

Aire Street Workshops is now on the disposal list of Leeds City Council which in turn threatens the existence of these businesses.

## **Leeds City Council executive member for development and the economy Councillor Richard Lewis:**

*"The fact Leeds bucked the national trend in numbers of SMEs is very pleasing and is a reflection of the tenacity of businesses in Leeds, as well as a lot of hard work which has gone into supporting and encouraging small and medium businesses to start up and develop in Leeds and the wider region.*

*These businesses have a crucial role to play in terms of job creation as we look to fulfil our ambition of becoming a NEET-free city (those not in education, employment or training).*

*In broader terms we need to now work hard to maximise the opportunities to develop businesses in the wider region, and this is where the work of the Leeds City Region, the Enterprise Zone and Local Enterprise Partnership in addition to the proposed new combined authority can and must make a real difference."*

With all of the above in mind we would like the Council to consider the following three points:

- 1) We would like to emphasise the value of the small businesses that operate from Aire Street Workshops and their contribution to the local economy, employment and creative and manufacturing industries. Aire Street Workshops was the first working model (set up by the council) to support and nurture small businesses in the city. Since then, numerous businesses have flourished and grown. An example would be Blueberry Marketing who have just relocated to larger offices in Leeds City Centre having been tenants at Aire Street since the business first started out.

It is fundamentally important to the fabric and diversity of the city, to have a council-led working community such as ours.

## **Faresh Maisuria, Managing Director at Blueberry Marketing Solutions:**

*"We'd like to speak as just one of the businesses who have found great value from Aire Street Workshops and strongly encourage that there is the same opportunity afforded to us, available for other small businesses. Especially with the view to job creation and the platform it has given us - not just as a business - but for the individuals who work within those businesses too"*

- 2) Aire Street Workshops has a fast growing population of 'Makers' i.e. manufacturing. There is a huge lack of affordable alternative workspace for these types of small businesses, especially where they boost a more diverse and interesting mix to the City Centre business structure. By providing this outlet LCC shows a great vision of forward thinking not seen in many other cities.

Aire Street Workshops is different to other working communities already in Leeds. We house a plethora of businesses, not just in one sector, but across multiple industries. Tenants favour the Aire Street community over other available space to them, because of the diversity and mix of businesses. There is no other working community in Leeds like it. We cannot be pigeon holed as a 'tech hub' or a 'creative co-working', we offer something more.

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- 3) We are a city centre jewel, in Leeds City Council's crown. Our own mini Northern Powerhouse. The tenants of Aire Street Workshops are working together and raising awareness of this small but dynamic alternative business centre and its contribution to Leeds. We have a self elected committee in place, consisting of visionaries and thinkers who (with LCC's backing) would like the opportunity to enhance the building's stature in the city and to creatively, help maximise the building's potential to both the tenants and the council.

The building is leased on the basis that LCVS are responsible for all care and repair of the building so there is absolutely no commitment of monetary outlay by LCC. LCC have commissioned a feasibility study to be carried out by Ginger Group, which may involve more substantial changes to the building. In this process, Aire Street tenants themselves have identified small, more affordable, self financing changes that can be made to improve the productivity and efficiency of the building. A creative, innovative, community-led approach - answering that call for 'ideas and inspirations'. We would like to be able to open the front units to the public as a change of use for those self contained units. Allowing a cross pollination of business ideas and inviting the public in to the space for pop up events, workshops, industry conferences etc. The venue could also house cultural events during the Leeds 2023 bid. Our tenants are already thinking of ideas to support that cause.

LCC have nothing to lose and everything to gain by keeping Aire Street Workshops and allowing the tenants to increase its value to the council and also to be a showcase for 2023.

Best Regards

**Aire Street Workshops Committee**