

Focal Point Gallery

Further analysis of the potential for artist studios

In Southend-on-Sea

Focal Point Gallery (FPG) is considering creating affordable artist studios in Southend and is looking to determine, in greater detail, the feasibility of doing so.

This coincides with work that the Beecroft Art Gallery Trust is undertaking to consider the future of its former gallery building in Westcliff-on-Sea. During a public consultation in 2015, the possibility of converting the site into artist studios was raised. The Trust is subsequently supporting a portion of this feasibility brief to consider whether that would be a viable option.

The key aims for the studio project:

- Generate additional income for Focal Point Gallery*
- Provide affordable artist workspaces to retain local talent and attract talent from London*
- Strengthen Southend-on-Sea's cultural offer*

An Executive Briefing has been approved by the relevant scrutiny committee within Southend Borough Council and the project has been discussed with the organisation's other key funder, The Arts Council England. Both parties are keen for further analysis on the following options and their potential to meet the aims above:

Phase 1:

A business feasibility study on Focal Point Gallery artist studios [generic]

Phase 2:

The feasibility of renovating the former Beecroft art gallery into artist studios [specific]

Scope

The gallery is now seeking a more detailed analysis of the options to determine;

Phase 1: Business feasibility

- Needs and use analysis
- Consider possible organisational and financial models- (i.e. establishing a trust/ charity/ setting up a company)
- Determine possible business models to generate income for the organisation via studios. Consider the compatibility of these against FPG's business model (2015).

-Demonstrate the probable economic impact on the gallery, the artistic community and Southend.

Phase 2: Renovating the former Beecroft gallery

The former Beecroft Art Gallery Building, based in Westcliff-on-Sea, was originally an Edwardian hotel. It was opened as a gallery in 1953, after being bought by a local solicitor, Walter Beecroft, and became the key component of the Beecroft bequest, which also cared for a permanent collection of around 2,000 art works, including pieces by Constable and Rossetti.

The building is managed by The Beecroft Art Trust with the aim of promoting 'the study of art, music and literature.' It has been empty since 2013 and the trust is now considering its future.

The following is sought:

- Survey of site
- Determine a schedule of facilities required
- Project brief (including plans and elevations) and schedule/possible timeline of works
- Contextual research (i.e. Site history which may affect the project into planning legislation and planning restrictions)
- Costing analysis (including ongoing costs, such as rates, maintenance, lease)
- Application of the aforementioned business model analysis to the building.

Background

-Focal Point Gallery is South Essex's gallery for contemporary visual art. It is part-funded by Southend Borough Council and Arts Council England, which recognises it as a National Portfolio Organisation. A celebrated asset, the not-for-profit organisation, plays a crucial role in the cultural offer of South Essex and engages with diverse audiences- locally, nationally and internationally

Having moved to a new location in the heart of the town and within an educational hub, FPG is keen to strengthen the area's cultural offer and boost its own financial resilience, by opening a complex of artist studios nearby.

A preliminary stage of research has been undertaken, including a number of site visits. In terms of anticipated demand: there are currently around 13 artists' studio blocks within Essex, with maximum capacity for a total 195-200 artists (this is an estimate, as some studios may be shared or currently unavailable). In South Essex, there are currently only 3 studios blocks – TAP, Studio 19 and Hadleigh Old Fire Station. All 3 are full and have long waiting lists.

Demand from London has also been considered. A recent Greater London Authority study “Creating Artists’ Workspace” to confront the 'current crisis of workspace provision' which is estimated to leave 3,500 London-based artists losing their places of work in the next five years, primarily due to rising property prices and (ironically) the success artist communities have had in regenerated areas such as Hackney.

This initial research also revealed that the option of renting a commercial space for the project, while still financially viable, did not offer the long-term security felt necessary to justify the input of resources.

As a gallery building, the former **Beecroft Art Gallery Building**, established a firm position within the tourist economy of Southend featuring, for example, in the Southend Museums Historic Seaside Walk. It’s location on the seafront became a cultural hub in its own right, with the Cliffs Pavilion theatre opening directly opposite in 1964; a pairing of two cultural attractions which naturally attracted small businesses.

Today, the gallery has been moved to the former library in the town centre and the building has been left vacant. A public consultation to consider the future of the building was held in 2015: for more information on this and the pre-existing reports on the building’s condition, contact via the details below.

Expression of interest

A sum of up to £25,000 [plus VAT] has been awarded to cover the project fee. This includes the research, data collection, meetings, travel and other materials required. Proposals should outline the days and rates planned.

Research is expected to be completed by April 2016.

If you are interested in completing this piece of work, please provide the following information in your proposal:

- Details of your organisation’s experience in delivering this type of research
- A proposed methodology for research and a breakdown of the budget required.
- Sources of information you are likely to use

Details of two references should be supplied.

Proposals should be emailed to riahpryor@southend.gov.uk, by 10 March 2016.

All respondents will be contacted a week after the deadline, with details of the decision.