



Via meanwhile use, empty land, sites, shops and buildings that would otherwise be left empty can become reanimated, providing outlets for community enterprise and activity, whilst complementing the efforts of surviving businesses and becoming a key part of place-making strategy



NOT A WASTE OF SPACE...

Meanwhile is a way of thinking; a way of seeing the natural pauses in the property process as opportunities. It's about animating and activating places and spaces while something else happens. By **Emily Berwyn**

Meanwhile use, although similar to temporary uses and involving temporary occupation of a space, takes the concept further to recognise vacancies as wasted space that could be put to use as an activity, or resource for the community, that can contribute to a better quality of life and better places. Meanwhile encompasses the use of a space while something else is waiting to happen, for example awaiting planning permission, a new tenant or a change in the economy – meanwhile use recognises that the search for a commercial use is ongoing. *The Meanwhile Use: Business Case and Learning Points* report by SQW Consulting (2010), commissioned by the Meanwhile Project and available online, defines meanwhile use as the 'temporary use of vacant buildings or land for a socially beneficial purpose until such a time that they can be brought back into commercial use'.

Via meanwhile use, empty sites, shops and buildings that would otherwise be left unused can become reanimated, providing outlets for community enterprise and activity, whilst complementing the efforts of surviving businesses and becoming a key part of place-making strategy. The core benefits of meanwhile uses are their impermanence and the freedom to experiment. Temporary uses offer opportunities for experimentation: a chance to take risks and test ideas.

Meanwhile became part of the Revitalising Town Centres policy in April 2009, launched to promote temporary community uses of vacant shops (and later sites and housing) in response to the challenges brought by the recession. The Meanwhile Project is an initiative led by the Development Trusts Association and Meanwhile Space CIC since 2009, initially funded by a grant from Communities & Local Government (CLG). It has combined

policy intervention, ground-level projects and development tools to enable the process to activate spaces: including development of customisable leases, handbooks, funding and guidance. Supporting social enterprises, community groups or enterprising individuals to access and create activity in empty spaces, the project seeks to highlight how empty space can be turned into a cost-effective and accessible resource.

It's a stretch to say empty spaces up and down the land are bursting with Meanwhile activity. But it is fair to say that meanwhile use is much, much more commonplace than it was eighteen months ago. Check out the report *No Time to Waste*, (www.meanwhile.org.uk) to see the evidence. Although it's unclear whether Meanwhile has the ongoing support of the coalition government, but with the meanwhile community now numbering more than 700 members, interest is continuing to grow. The concept of the Big Society, and the coalition government's plans to enable the third sector to enjoy more control over their areas and the public services within them, may provide a valuable testing ground that meanwhile can be part of. Meanwhile activity is a great way to test the feasibility of community activity and delivery potential, and can support innovation in the temporary use of vacant assets.

For those drawn to Meanwhile activity, resourcefulness and creativity are second nature, so 'meanwhilers' are unlikely to be daunted by the challenges of spending cuts. It's a growing sector too, as social enterprises and other organisations are beginning seek out and use vacant space as community resources.

In recent years, temporary activity has become increasingly acceptable. A 'resource base' is being to grow, with reports,