



Community



Feature

The Glasgow 'window': how a tiny intervention spawned a 'spare room for the community

Lee Ivett of emerging practice Baxendale and Duncan Blackmore of developer Arrant Land have planted the seeds for an unusual community-led project in Glasgow by knocking a porthole into a windowless and formerly abandoned storeroom, reports *Richard Waite*.

In October 2017, Blackmore paid £22,000 for the leaking, single-storey building, which sits between two tenement blocks in Govanhill, without having visited the site.

Undecided about its potential use, the pair have opened up the building to local residents, letting them govern what should and could happen with it.

Following the addition of the circular window, as well as repairs to the roof, the former shop has begun growing into a new, adaptable 'spare room' for the street. Dubbed 'The Kiosk', it has already hosted a range of community events, including film screenings, and its future 'small scale civic' uses will continue to be guided by the residents.

'[This] is not about doing something while we consider the future of the property,' stresses Blackmore, who is known more for his residential schemes in London and the South East.

'It's more about allowing the future to present itself in as non-determinative a way as possible and learning from that process as we go. I can't imagine a situation where the property is taken out of community use as long as it is being useful and run responsibly.'

Ivett, whose practice is based in the city, adds: 'Before building anything new, I believe, we should always create and invest in cultural, social and economic programmes at a small scale that test potential and possibility, using whatever resources are immediately to hand.'

'Before building a new theatre, let's put on a play. Before building a community café, let's have a meal together. Before building an arts centre, let's make some art.'

'And that's what that little window we've knocked into a wall



Before

in Govanhill is. It is quite simply an invitation to participate. To test. To prototype. To create.'

'It is a place [for things] that you can't do in your kitchen, your living room or your bedroom. To try something that engages with an audience beyond yourself and your own immediacy – but not with any pressure, or any expense – to a few people not a few hundred. It's civic life at the small scale; prototypical rather than just typical.'

Explaining the project's finances, Blackmore explains: 'We do not charge anybody for the use of the space. We hope this very local community – the same street – will take on some of the management and can cover the costs of running the place, such as insurance and services but no rent, by putting on a couple of events or hosting pop-ups. It could largely be up to them to determine how this would work.'

'[This] is not about corporate responsibility or marketing, or about Arrant Land making an entry into the Glasgow market.'

'Apart from [personal] interest and enjoyment, I see real value in what I am learning. It's not easy to point at on a spreadsheet or justify to a bank, but that doesn't mean it's not valuable.'



