

PREMISES

¹This section shows what premises solutions various Sheds have found.

1. Minimal premises

The Hollywood MS (Men's Shed) started three years ago and is focused around doing cleaning and repairing jobs in the public spaces around the town. After a while they got a lockable cupboard in a public space to store their tools and materials and only recently got a larger one.

2. * Loaned by members/friends.

The Shed in Douglas (Isle of Man) started in a double garage.

The Carmel and Holywell Woodworking Club, which is a Shed in all but name, started in the founder's garage until it built up enough members and sales to feel confident in hiring a publicly-owned premises 1.5 days p.w. 12 years later it has some 50 members and is remarkable for operating without having had a public or trust grant.

* Using hard-to-let shop premises

Local authorities may prefer to have empty shops used rather than detract from the environment. Stratford on Avon MS started by sharing a local Sea Cadets hut but this proved difficult to manage. They then moved to a disused local shop that the local authority had given for temporary use to an arts organisation. It had no electricity but a lot of natural light on the first floor.

* Finding an under-used space. Housing Associations can be large property owners with a whole range of buildings e.g. disused garage blocks and a social remit.

Shettleston MS was immediately offered a potential building by its local housing association along with the support of a community development worker.

Faringdon has made a start by using the woodwork room of a local college of an evening.

* Using redundant premises where the owners take a benevolent approach.

Collingham MS has found a local builder who is willing to let them use a spare building.

Sansaw MS has been granted the use of a farm building which had become too small to house today's larger machinery.

* Using temporarily redundant buildings where the managers/owners seek formal, free but temporary use of their premises. They may be empty for a range of reasons such as planning blight, lack of liquidity, changes in management etc. When buildings are sold for adaptation for example it can take 18 months before planning permission is granted. The owners will normally be paying 100% Business Rates but charities get 80% mandatory rate relief and other organisations may qualify too. The building's security may also be a motivation for the owner. Healthy Planet is a not-for-profit agency that identifies building owners and then looks for groups with charitable objectives who need the space. The arrangement can save the owners a lot of money. The places are held on temporary licenses but as they are rent-free it is a way of getting the group stated and focused. <https://beta.healthyplanet.org/get-involved/sustainable-community/healthy-spaces>

¹ Extract from:- <http://www.menssheds.org.uk/index.php/getting-started/84-subpages/121-linkedarticle#premise>
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MakeitWorkshop in Southport has had a large modern shop premises through Healthy Planet for over 18 months.

* Using premises by 'paying in kind' or other reciprocal arrangement.

Gosport MS got use of two large casements in the walls of Fort Brockhurst, a truly massive structure. The owners, English Heritage, anticipated more benefits to accrue than the Shed could offer and Gosport is now looking elsewhere.

The Repair Shed, Hemel Hempstead has the use of part of a building on a site occupied by a horticultural social enterprise in exchange for occasional work. This arrangement recently needed some discussion as, like flat-sharing, it's the little differences in expectation that can begin to undermine it.

The local history museum in Louth (N.I.) offered a space to the Shed in exchange for help maintaining the exhibits. This provided the Sheddors with a rich vein of activity and learning.

Brixham is now housed in a charity shop interested in getting some of its incoming goods fixed.

* Public authorities can have property that they do not wish to part with but do not have the funds to enable it to be let. Extensive leases can be gained in exchange for repair/maintenance.

Broadstairs Town Shed has a rent-free lease whilst it does up a long-empty building owned by the local council.

Maldon CVS obtained a redundant mortuary from local authority which also helped fund its restoration.

3. Adapting a vehicle

Thanet Men's Shed are planning a mobile Shed in order to reach smaller communities and also to promote the Shed concept. This will be a trailer that looks like a Shed. A van with a range of equipment is a way that some tradesmen work and that idea could be adapted.

4. Eastleigh is starting by demolishing a dilapidated shed in the large back garden of a widow's house and building a new one. They are getting a tenancy.

Brentwood has built a Shed in the grounds of a church.

5. Hiring

With hiring the whole cost of the usage is rolled into an hourly/daily charge. This means there will be no additional bills e.g. utility, maintenance, safety checks etc. This can help with budgeting and you only pay for the hours you use. It can mean restricted usage, and almost certainly you will need to clear up afterwards for others to use the room. However it is available, can make for a quick start, if affordable it can last indefinitely, and it does not require taking on onerous responsibilities. If booking blocks of time seek a reduced hourly rate as most bookings are for short periods.

Cockermouth MiS (Men in Sheds) started by hiring a room in a community centre one afternoon a week but as it became more popular the local Age UK Board rented a workshop. The aim is that the Sheddors would cover the rent from sales of donated and refurbished goods and so far it is working!

Macmerry MS hires a community hall and storage cupboard and uses an outside space in good weather.

Camden Town Shed hires a Community Centre room two days p. w. and pays by the quarter. An initial rent-free period was negotiated on the basis that it was raising the profile of the Centre by bringing in a group of people targeted by the local authority who funded it. The Centre subsequently found it could not let the room and granted full use without any alteration to the charge.

Southbourne MS operates out of an old village school cloakroom courtesy of Age Concern which leases the property from the County Council. It has taken six months for the men to put the building in a state where it could be used. This has been made possible by a donation of £1000 from Age Concern'

Eltham MiS began by hiring a room 16'x 12' in a community centre in which 6 people could work. It opened 6 days p.w. and grew to having 40+ members before moving.

6. Premises provided within an organisation's current space.

- The Ecology Centre at Kinghorn, Fife, formed a Shed group around the idea of repairing/reusing tools and offered the group a space.
- The Tool Shed in Skelmersdale is part of Total Reuse CIC, a large social enterprise in premises funded from its earnings.

7. Renting at commercial rates

Age UK and its affiliates have opened several Sheds in units on industrial estates having first raised the funds and hired staff. Before owners let property they need to assure themselves that any tenant can honour the terms of the tenancy agreement. In these cases they had an established organization to deal with. New independent Shed groups may face problems in assuring owners. Getting an established organization to be a guarantor is one way forward but be sure you are happy with the conditions. Having one or more 'public' or professional figures on your board/management committee can also help, particularly in smaller communities.

- Milton Keynes MiS rents a 4000 sq ft industrial unit
- Leeds MS (Groundwork) rents a 1000 sq ft workshop with funds from Leeds City Council
- Community Impact Bucks started a Shed off in an arts centre but then helped it rent an industrial unit.

What to Look For

In most cases this question will be a bit academic as it will be a case of adapting to what's available, yet it is not an irrelevant one. There are plenty of examples above of options people have taken that have worked. One of the lessons from above is that the units that are on industrial estates away from public transport still get plenty of people attending, though nearer to bus routes would be better. (A physically handicapped man used to travel for up to 1.5 hours to get to the Eltham MiS).

Here are some other considerations, though not all necessary at the outset:

- * Where will you have that vital tea-break/social time and wash up afterwards?
- * Will your noise (laughter?) disturb neighbours?
- * If sharing where can store your tools as well as 'work in progress' so it is not damaged?
- * Is there somewhere nearby where you can store donated wood – it soon clutters your room!
- * How would you move goods in or out, especially something heavy?
- * Where will you store inflammables like paint, varnish safely?
- * Is there an adjacent outdoor space you can work and increase your space? Much of the year people can work outdoors and with dust inhalation a serious health consideration it can be very helpful.
- * Will you be able to install dust extraction and electrical safety devices in the future?

How to Look

1. Looking for empty Properties

Survey the town You could start by getting your group to first survey the town with cameras to hand and then share the pictures as a group and see what is known about the properties. It can generate some lines of enquiry particularly with property that has not been used for a while. When repeated at a later date it could generate more information to be followed up. Frome MS

Some local authorities publish on their website the addresses of all the empty business premises in the town, along with the business rates account holder (if not an individual), the rateable value (a useful indicator of size), and the date from which the premises have been vacant.

2. Looking for underused properties

This requires networking as the fact that they are under used will not be visible from the street.

When visiting properties, chatting to the people around is an invaluable source of information. Travelling by bicycle rather than by car makes this much easier and you see more and can stop anywhere. I've learned that I need to talk to established local charities. A local charity that sells second-hand furniture has offered us a bit of unused space in one of its warehouses, and a branch of The Bicycle Kitchen (it provided space and tools and assistance for people to repair their bikes) has taken on a department store that is awaiting demolition and is keen to have us move in and pay a share of its costs. Andrew Horne, Reading

'Don't be put off by thinking that other community groups are competition – They're usually not. So visit any Community Bicycle repair groups, Tools refurbishment groups, allotments groups, etc. We used this approach, and were quickly introduced to a Youth Enterprise – Supporting Apprentices (Age 18-24). They had an underused workshop, that we will be renting on a short-term basis until we find permanent premises.' Patrick Abrahams Frome Shed

3. Looking for Shared Interests

There are many instances above where our need for a space has met the need of a property manager ranging from their need for income, to save rates, to make a building more secure, to not have a high street look run-down, to be philanthropic, to achieve a community development outcome and to assist the host achieve their project goals. These are known routes to which will be added more examples such as a health authority backing a Shed to achieve health outcomes, or a recycling charity for re-use goals, an allotment society with spare space that want somewhere to meet on site in the winter or a rehabilitation society looking to integrate its charges. To find more of these its pays to get publicized!

4. Looking for a miracle: Following a newspaper article, Brixham MS was offered for a nominal rent a fully –equipped workshop which the Youth Enquiry Service now found redundant.