

From Vacancy to Vibrancy

The Role of Ramsgate Space in Local Regeneration

Presenters: Louise Brooks and Georgie Street



Ramsgate Space CIC

Ramsgate Space CIC is dedicated to transforming our town centre by **unlocking empty shops** and putting them back into meaningful use.

Our mission is to create opportunities for local businesses, entrepreneurs, and community organisations to test ideas in a low-risk, supportive environment; **turning vacant spaces into thriving hubs of activity and innovation.**





Ramsgate's Empty Shops Problem

Ramsgate's high street is full of untapped potential, but with **18% of retail units sitting empty** – the highest vacancy rate in the country compared to the 13.9% national average.

Our audit revealed a bigger issue: **60% of Ramsgate's empty shops aren't even available to rent.**

Locked in by large **portfolio holders, pension funds**, and **absentee landlords**, leaving the economy of our business neighbourhood stagnant.

Action is needed to reverse Ramsgate's decline.

The Real Cost of Empty Shops

Each vacant unit **reduces footfall, weakens consumer confidence**, and contributes to an **atmosphere of decline**.

The result is **lower spending, higher instances of anti-social behaviour**, and **a town centre that feels unsafe or unloved**.

For the businesses that remain, **the lack of critical mass** makes it **harder to attract customers** and **even harder to survive**.

**Empty shops impact on all
of us**



Why it Matters

Wellbeing & Belonging

Local environment is linked to life satisfaction and anxiety
(What Works Centre for Wellbeing)

Disconnected Communities

Empty high streets are tied to lower civic participation and trust
(Local Trust)

Economic Potential

Vacant shops limit entrepreneurship and local supply chains
(CLES)

Pride in Place

Attractive public spaces strengthen citizenship and care
(British Academy)

Health & Inclusion

Active town centres improve mental and physical health
(Public Health England)



We've spent our careers transforming town centres — and now we're bringing that energy home to Ramsgate.



Meet Our Team



Louise Brooks
FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR

15+ years in town
centre revitalisation.
Specialist in retail
strategy, meanwhile
use, and footfall-
driving events across
the UK.



Georgie Street
FOUNDER & PROJECTS
DIRECTOR

High street design and
activation expert. Led
major public realm and
community projects in
Camden and Euston.



Caroline Swain
FINANCE DIRECTOR

Financial strategist
with deep experience in
tourism and seasonal
economies. Formerly at
Dreamland and Big Bus
Tours.



Emma Jones
NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Founder of Enterprise
Nation, champion of
small businesses, and
local resident bringing
national influence to
Ramsgate.



What We're Doing



Ramsgate Space HQ is our base of operations and a prototype for high street regeneration. From here, we:

Unlock Empty Shops

Investigate ownership and barriers to access. Work directly with landlords and councils to bring shops back into use.

Support New Businesses

Offer free weekly drop-in sessions and ongoing advice for entrepreneurs, creatives and community groups.

Provide Flexible Space Hire

Available Friday–Monday for pop-ups, workshops, classes and meetings.

Host Events & Conversations

Run public panel talks and working groups to catalyse local ideas and drive strategic regeneration conversations.

Test and Innovate

Trial diverse uses that boost footfall and show what's possible—creative residencies, installations, and community programming.

New: Hospitality Incubator Kitchen

Launching a modular test kitchen to support food entrepreneurs and community dining—removing barriers to entry in Ramsgate's growing hospitality scene.

Our Impact

Immediate Results

- 20+ local businesses supported
- 1,500+ supporters
- First business about to get keys!

Hospitality Incubator Launching

- Will allow aspiring chefs to test ideas
- Flexible, low-risk route into Ramsgate's food economy

Civic Reconnection

- Building a sense of pride through visible change: Albert Court as a test bed
- Platforms for local voices in regeneration
- 15+ active volunteers shaping our future

Systemic Influence

- Leading Ramsgate's Empty Shops Working Group
- Advocating for local-first approaches in Plan for Neighbourhoods; facilitating set up of Ramsgate Traders Group
- Supporting rollout of High Street Rental Auctions



How We Will Deliver Change



reduce vacancy rates

Identify ownership, work with property owners, introduce flexible tenancies; tackle land-banking, business rates avoidance, and absentee landlords.



business sustainability

Provide low-risk environment to test space ideas. Provide business support. Collaborate with the business community to create a supportive, sustainable environment.



leverage policy & regulation

Use High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs), Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) and Community Right to Buy legislation to reclaim empty spaces.



boost footfall & investment

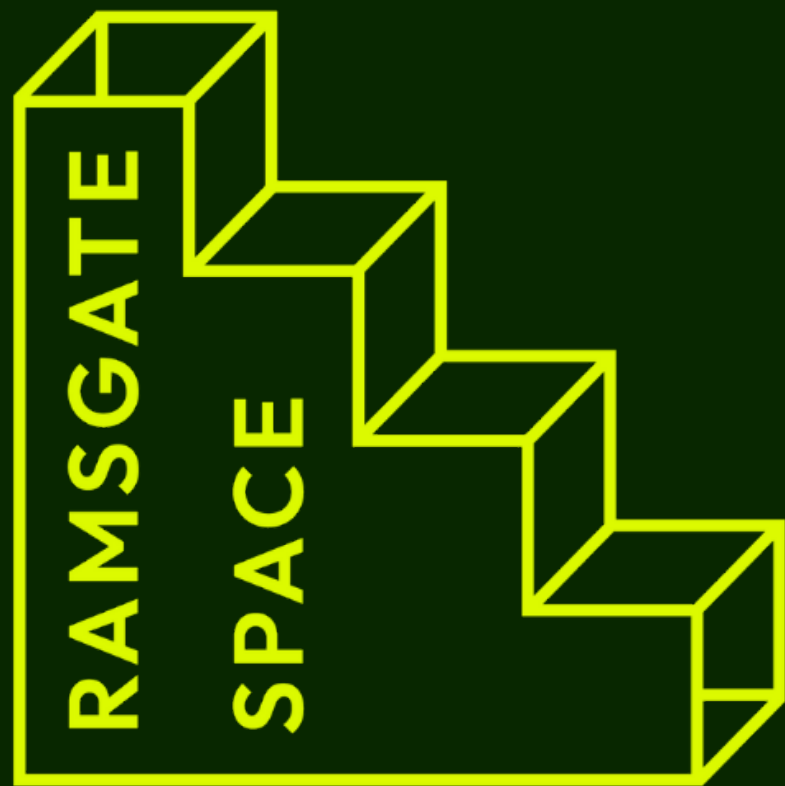
Attract businesses to and investment in Ramsgate. Support dynamic cultural programming and town centre activation.



local property ownership

Facilitating the purchase of buildings for long-term community benefit.

Understanding the Bigger Picture



The Local Context

Deprivation & Economic Challenge

- Ramsgate ranks in the top 10% most deprived areas in England (IMD 2021).
- Youth unemployment is 11.6%, the highest in the South East.
- No net job growth in the last decade.

Commercial Space & Employment

- Ramsgate has 1,665 businesses, mostly micro-enterprises, but they lack grow-on space.
- Commercial space is more expensive than elsewhere in Thanet, limiting local start-up potential.
- Business growth is up 1.66% in the last 12 months.

Education & Skills

- School attainment and qualification levels are lower than other parts of Kent.
- There is limited access to apprenticeships, training, and upskilling, especially for youth and over-50s.

Town Centre

- Public feedback describes the town centre as “neglected, unattractive, and unwelcoming”.
- High vacancy rates in historic buildings and few green, public gathering spaces affect vibrancy and civic pride.

Visitor Economy Potential

- Visitor spend in Ramsgate has increased by 40% since 2013, but Ramsgate still lags behind Margate and Broadstairs in perception.
- Key sites like the Royal Harbour and East Cliff are underutilised but full of potential.



Community Priorities

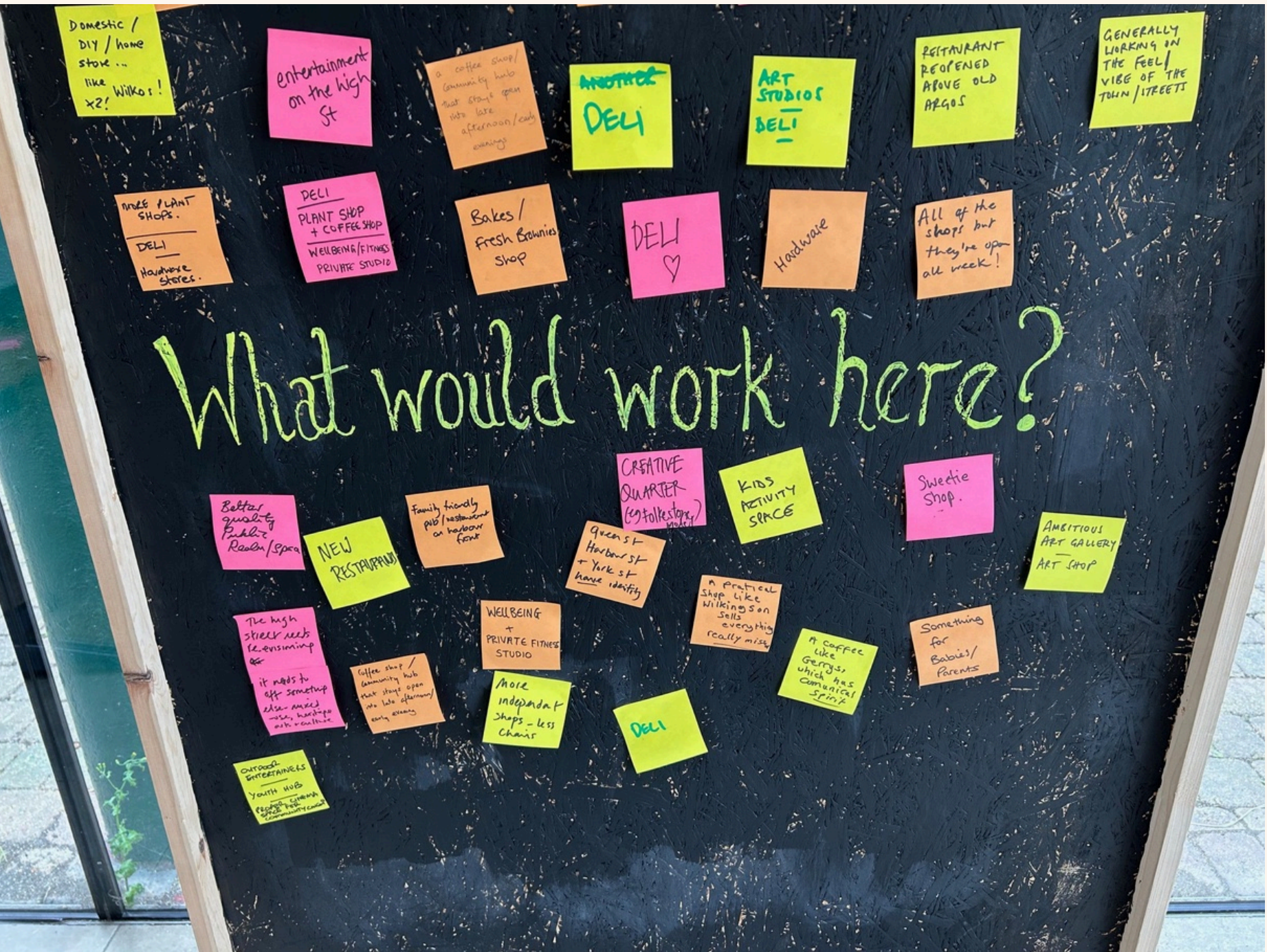
Local character matters. There's a clear preference for independent, distinctive, or purpose-driven businesses.

Food is foundational. Cafés, delis, and restaurants feature prominently across all boards.

Community and creativity are high priorities. Public art, creative quarters, and activity spaces for all ages are repeatedly suggested.

Practical amenities are still needed. Wilko-like stores, HMRC services, and hardware shops highlight a desire for daily-life convenience.

Health and wellbeing is an emerging theme. Studios and wellness-related spaces appear as desirable uses.



High Streets: From Decline to Reinvention

Why They've Declined:

- **Online Retail:** 1 in 4 sales now online—leaving high streets empty.
- **Collapse of Chains:** Big names gone, footfall gone with them.
- **High Costs:** Rents and rates too steep for small businesses.
- **Planning Gaps:** Car-centric design and poor public realm.
- **Lifestyle Shifts:** Remote work, out-of-town retail dominate.
- **Disconnected Offer:** Fewer places to gather, belong, or meet real needs.

Where They're Going:

- **Less Retail, More Purpose:** Spaces for food, culture, services, learning.
- **Experience Over Transaction:** Focus on community and creativity.
- **Flexible Use:** Pop-ups, shared space, short leases.
- **Civic Hubs:** High streets as places to connect, not just consume.
- **Rise of Localism:** 15-minute neighbourhoods, community ownership.



Regeneration in Ramsgate: Making Investment Matter

Over £25m in capital investment has flowed into Ramsgate (FHSF, LUF, HAZ) — but funding has focused on buildings, not people.

Ramsgate Space CIC is bridging that gap.

We activate empty shops, support new businesses, and bring communities into the conversation.

Our Role in the Bigger Picture:

- Convening the Community: We're facilitating the newly formed Ramsgate Traders Group — giving local businesses a voice and influence.
- Connecting the Dots: Turning top-down funding into bottom-up action.
- Leading the Way: Positioned to play a lead role in shaping the Plan for Neighbourhoods, ensuring local needs and ideas drive long-term change.



The long term benefits of comparative schemes include the growth of the local economy and jobs, an increase in town investment and improvements in safety and of pride in place for the community.

CASE STUDIES

Brixton Village, London



Increased popularity led to full occupancy, supporting local jobs and businesses

SCHEME

This arcade had been deteriorating for years and 20 units sat empty. Partial demolition and redevelopment into a 10-storey apartment block was planned.

After a successful community campaign in 2009, Spacemakers were invited by London & Associated Properties and Lambeth Council to create an alternative plan. They designed a project offering 3 months of free rent to anyone with an idea for reusing the empty spaces.

IMPACT

- 98 proposals received in one week. Units repurposed for band rehearsals, galleries, shops and cafes
- By project's end in 2010, Market fully let for the first time since 1979, establishing a thriving local economy in Brixton
- By 2016 there was a waiting list for properties.

CASE STUDIES

Camden Collective, London



Turning empty shops into creative hubs that launch careers and local economies.

SCHEME

Camden Collective was launched to tackle high vacancy rates on Camden High Street by transforming empty shops and buildings into spaces for creative startups. Initially funded by Camden Council, charitable trusts, and the Mayor of London, the project made use of council-owned buildings under 'meanwhile use' arrangements.

- Each space builds a new local community and economy.
- Now self-sustaining via subsidised office income reinvested into new spaces.

IMPACT

- Used council-owned buildings for successful 'meanwhile use'.
- Gained credibility, now works with private landlords and TfL.
- Offers coworking, retail, and learning spaces to support young entrepreneurs.
- Each space builds a new local community and economy.
- Now self-sustaining via subsidised office income reinvested into new spaces.

CASE STUDIES

Creative Folkestone, Folkestone



Folkestone's transformation proves that investing in people and culture can drive lasting, inclusive regeneration

SCHEME

Creative Folkestone aims to revitalise the town through cultural and creative projects, successfully transforming empty shops and buildings over the past 20 years. Empty shops were offered at affordable rents. 90 buildings were restored, including 50 shops offered at affordable rents, 80 flats for affordable housing, and 115 studios and offices, including Glasshouse Digital. This sustainable model reinvests surplus income in to cultural programming.

IMPACT

- Significant economic and social revitalisation, benefiting the local community
- Activated empty shops and affordable rents have revitalised Folkestone
- Increased Property Values: Occupancy of vacant buildings has boosted local property values
- High Demand for Properties: Creative initiatives have created a waiting list for available spaces
- Economic Growth: Increased footfall from cultural events has benefited local businesses
- Increased Footfall: Events like the Folkestone Triennale drew 135,000 visitors in 2014, generating £65 million for the local economy

CASE STUDIES

The Centre, Margate



The Centre is now a thriving business community at full occupancy.

SCHEME

A change in retail strategy to shift perception of place by focusing on attracting independent occupiers, implementing a new visual identity and properly engaging local communities in the shopping precinct's development. Key elements of the strategy included redesigning and painting facades, curating a range of independent shops, and utilising outdoor space to enhance the shopping and dining experience.

IMPACT

- **Increased Occupancy:** Occupancy rates surged from 60% to full capacity, attracting a diverse array of independent retailers, including notable visitors like the Queen's son and Pedro Pascal
- **Vibrant Community Hub:** The influx of independent businesses created a lively atmosphere, appealing to both locals and tourists
- **Enhanced Brand Identity:** The new branding and visual upgrades established The Centre as a sought-after shopping destination

CASE STUDIES

Aberfeldy Street, Poplar



Aberfeldy Street transformed in to an appealing destination for prospective residents moving into the area.

SCHEME

A significant transformation to revitalise the area and drive occupancy. Building facades were transformed with vibrant Bangladeshi fabric-inspired designs and coloured street lighting. A meanwhile use scheme offered empty shops to social entrepreneurs on an initial peppercorn basis, before moving onto a laddered rent.

IMPACT

- A low-barrier environment encouraged existing tenants and new social enterprises to thrive
- Social cohesion and interaction around this community asset made the street a desirable location for both residents and businesses
- Activation of shops enhanced safety and security in the area while instilling a sense of pride among the local community
- Full occupancy with thriving businesses

How can you get involved

1 **Become a patron** <https://www.ramsgatespace.co.uk/patron>

2 **Donate** <https://www.ramsgatespace.co.uk/donations>

3 **Volunteer** hello@ramsgatespace.com

4 **Attend business support programme, Thursday 1-2pm**

5 **Sign up to our mailing list** to hear about talks and events
hello@ramsgatespace.com



CONTACT US

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GET IN TOUCH

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Join us in driving lasting change in our town centre

