



SOUTHSIDE STUDIOS

HBS Grant £3,000



We are South Side Studios, a community interest company founded and run by local creative director Fiona Garden. We activate vacant and underused buildings in the centre of Leighton Buzzard, transforming them into accessible, affordable spaces for artists, micro-businesses, and community groups. By supporting creative enterprise and community-led activity, we aim to revitalise the town centre through place-making, collaboration and visibility for local talent.

The grant supplied by Harpenden Building Society has directly enabled us to unlock the former Wilko building at 28 High Street, which had been vacant for over three years. The funding allowed us to approach the landlord with a concrete three-month license fee offer. That offer, made possible by Harpenden's support, opened the long-closed doors to over 10,000 square feet of prime high street space for Culture Co:LB's Co Lab pop-up.

In the three months since, the Co Lab space hosted a packed calendar of activity and connection: sound baths, a two-day ambient music festival, a huge LEGO event, a wellness weekend, community film screenings, a huge open call art exhibition, and a large-scale textile installation. Each day, people pop in and take a look and express how thrilled they are that this is all happening.

All of these events have been powered by community energy and self-generated income from the space itself, with no other external funding. We have also commissioned and funded a top-tier impact study of the activation - by a leading creative economies academic Dr Tarek Virani, with a mind to influencing policy locally and nationally.

The project has been a catalyst to increase town centre footfall, new partnerships across creative, enterprise, heritage, and wellbeing sectors. It's also achieved a higher public profile for Leighton Buzzard as a town that backs its local talent. The Co Lab has also made visible the demand for accessible space and sparked new energy around what is possible for the high street.

We welcome Harpenden members to visit The Co Lab at 28 High Street during September. The three-month Co Lab programme across June, July, and August was led by Culture Co:LB, a coalition of local partners across arts, culture, heritage, health, and enterprise - with huge contributions from Leighton Buzzard Art Society, LBDHAS, and a host of other collaborators. The space will now continue under the stewardship of South Side Studios for as long as it remains available, with the ambition to build on this success.

The grant we received did not just fund a pop-up. It sparked a meaningful, community-led transformation and a model of place-making that we hope to carry forward. Thank you for making that possible!

You can also find us online at:

- culturecolb.uk
- [Culture Co:LB Instagram](#)
- southsidestudios.uk
- [South Side Studios Instagram](#)