

# SAVE FIDDLERS

**A partnership project from Bedminster Works and Artspace Lifespace to protect and develop Fiddlers into a new cultural hub for South Bristol**

## Overview

Fiddlers was a beloved music and community venue in Bedminster, South Bristol and is at imminent risk of being lost forever. The family that has run it for three decades is seeking to retire, and the venue is due to go to auction in June 2026 with a guide price of £900,000 and advertised as having scope for “Residential Conversion”.

Bedminster Works, in partnership with Artspace Lifespace is now seeking to acquire and reimagine Fiddlers as a permanently affordable, multi-use community hub.

The vision is to maintain Fiddlers as a live music and performance venue with affordable music studios, and flexible community space to make Fiddlers an anchor for music and community in South Bristol.

We are urgently seeking philanthropic pledges and community investment ahead of the auction on 17th June 2026.

## Our Vision for Fiddlers

*A multi-use venue, performance space and community hub in the heart of Bedminster, South Bristol, preserving a locally significant heritage and music venue for generations to come.*

We propose to transform Fiddlers into a permanent, community-anchored hub, active year-round, financially resilient through diversified earned income, and governed in a way that protects affordability and community inclusivity in perpetuity.

### Live Music Venue

Fiddlers' main room and stage would be retained and enhanced as a live music venue, continuing its decades-long role as a home for emerging talent and world-class artists alike. By day this space can be active for rehearsal and other multi-use activities.

### **Affordable Music Studios**

A mix of long-term studio residencies and hireable rooms, providing 24-hour access to music rehearsal facilities at affordable rates. Studios would operate on an earned income model that cross-subsidises the residency and incubation programme. An important part of the programme will be to support access to the arts for people and communities under-represented in the sector.

### **Community & Multi-Use Space**

A flexible community space would make Fiddlers an anchor for South Bristol available to local organisations, young people, grassroots groups and residents who have seen so many other spaces disappear. The community space would be designed with the community to ensure it meets local needs. Potential uses could include gathering spaces, a community pantry, etc.

## **Why Fiddlers? Why Now?**

### **A Venue of Irreplaceable Heritage**

Fiddlers has been a cornerstone of Bristol's music landscape for over thirty years. World-class artists and local emerging talent have shared the same boards, with Fiddlers welcoming Robert Plant, the Buzzcocks, Manu Chao, Lee "Scratch" Perry, Dinosaur Jr, KT Tunstall, George Ezra and Billy Bragg among many more.

The building has been part of Bedminster's gathering economy in one form or another for nearly three centuries. It started as a malt house in the heart of Bedminster's brewing district, and subsequently served as the Social Club for the workers, their families and neighbours (George's Brewery and then Courage Brewery).

### **A Crisis of Community Spaces in Bedminster**

Bedminster presents a mixed picture of urban regeneration alongside areas of entrenched deprivation. Redevelopment has brought a potential "gentrification crisis" to Bedminster with new high-rise student accommodation and higher priced apartments threatening to clash with the traditional community, rising costs and displacement. The areas immediately adjacent to Fiddlers, including the East Street corridor, sit within the most deprived 10–15% of neighbourhoods in England.

In 2025 Approximately 30 grassroots music venues closed permanently across the UK (Music Venue Trust, 2026 report). The loss of social infrastructure in recent years includes:

- 2021: The Assembly pub closed; sale to residential private developer
- 2023: Closure of the Ex United Reform Church community facility after sale to private developer
- 2023 -2026 : Five further pubs closed: the Albert, the Black Cat, the London Inn, the Tap & Barrel and The Apple Tree.

The Albert has now reopened as the Departure Lounge and the team behind Shredenham's have revived The Tap and Barrell as the Dame demonstrating the community need for spaces. However there are no prominent dedicated nightclubs remaining directly in South Bristol. The loss of Fiddlers would not simply be the loss of a grassroots venue, it would be the loss of an important music and cultural anchor in South Bristol.

### **Creative and Night-time Economies**

Bristol is one of the UK's strongest creative economies, with Aardman, the Tobacco Factory, Spike Island and Bottle Yard Studios all based in South Bristol, alongside smaller independent studios. Bristol has the highest concentration of music artists of any UK city ([research](#) from Pirate Studio), and that scene depends on venues like Fiddlers to work as a mixed-use venue and creative workspace - where young, under-served and emerging local artists, promoters, technicians and crews can affordably learn their craft and earn their first paid work in the industry.

Retaining Fiddlers as a working music venue and creative space means protecting jobs, skills development and supply chains, whilst reinvigorating the night-time economy in a part of Bristol that has been steadily losing spaces that drive that economy.

### **The Need for Affordable Music Studios**

Bristol has a remarkable musical culture and a shortage of affordable, permanent studio space to support it.

The Island Bristol Music Studios managed by Artspace Lifespace maintains a 100% occupancy rate and a large waiting list. It offers permanent, affordable studio bases for artists, not just drop-in hourly hire. Pricing for recording studios in Bristol averages £30 per hour, which creates a significant barrier for early-career and emerging artists.

Community voices have highlighted this gap. A community petition to Bristol Arts and Music Service (BAMS) highlighted that young bands in Bristol were finding it hard to start out as they could not afford decent rehearsal spaces for adequate amounts of time, with concerns for the impact that would have on young artists and the Bristol music scene.

## Who We Are?

### Artspace Lifespace

[Artspace Lifespace](#) brings expertise in community asset transformation, heritage buildings, earned-income studio models, and governance structures that protect affordability for artists and communities.

Artspace Lifespace (ASLS) is a Bristol-based registered charity with a 20-year track record of transforming vacant spaces into creative hubs including recent projects:

- *The Island*, a multi-use creative space in central Bristol - 18 years of 'meanwhile' use.
- *Sparks Bristol*, a pioneering arts and sustainability hub.
- *Ashton Court Mansion*, eight years of creative stewardship of a Grade I listed heritage building from 2018-2026 saving it from dereliction.

### Bedminster Works

[Bedminster Works](#) is a community-led organisation rooted in South Bristol, committed to the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of Bedminster and its residents. We work with property owners, developers, community organisations, traders and social investors, to broker the relationships that unlock buildings and build the structures that make community use last.

## The Plan

Fiddlers is due to go to auction with a **guide price of £900,000** on 17th June 2026. This means the immediate campaign priority is the acquisition itself.

Our model is deliberately staged to de-risk the ask and build evidence of impact:

**Phase 1 - Acquisition:** Secure the building pre-auction by negotiating an 'agreement to purchase' with the owner (an agreed price, a timescale, and a short term lease agreement in the meantime). This requires us to have philanthropic pledges, social investment plans, community investment plans, and community support well ahead of the auction date.

**Phase 2 - Activation:** Activate the venue rapidly and affordably to generate income, demonstrate demand, and embed community use. Activation protects the building, builds the programme, and creates the evidence base for capital investment. This would be an opportunity to work with the local community to create and pilot projects to meet their needs.

**Phase 3 - Secure Funds and Finalise Purchase:** Turn philanthropic pledges into donations, run crowdfunder, secure social investment and potential other sources of borrowing. Set up a new organisation with charitable status to hold the building in perpetuity. Final purchase of building.

**Phase 4 - Capital Development:** With proof of concept established, we would pursue capital grants (e.g. Arts Council England, Music Venue Trust, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and others) to fund permanent refurbishment of the studios, performance space and training facilities.

## The Ask - How You Can Help?

We are seeking:

**Major donor pledges:** Pledges that demonstrate confidence and unlock further support.

**Loan investment:** Ideas and offers from individuals and organisations who want to see Fiddlers saved and remain invested in its future.

**Gifts in kind:** Professional services, expertise and introductions to people who can help us meet our asks

**Advocacy and amplification:** Using your networks to broaden the reach of the campaign to save Fiddlers.

If you would like to support the Save Fiddlers campaign as a major donor, community investor, or in another capacity, please get in touch as a matter of urgency.

Please contact:

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Further information about the property can be found on the Hollis Morgan site [here](#).