

BIRKENHEAD: THE LAIRD ENTERPRISE TRUST

Making the most of local resources

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The Birkenhead School of Art (now The Laird Building), 2019.

In the early 1980s, a group of Birkenhead residents came together to reclaim the derelict Birkenhead School of Art for the local community's use. Its state of decay epitomized the plight of the town, and its revitalization was symbolic as well as functional.

“The problems of the Conway area are only too well known [...] Unemployment, limited community facilities, surroundings sadly declined from what they once were.”

INTRODUCTION TO MAKING THE MOST OF LOCAL RESOURCES

Developing the plan

Their plan, titled ‘**Making the Most of Local Resources**’ was developed with support from the Town and Country Planning Association and the neighbourhood planning pioneer, Tony Gibson. The building was leased from the council and the Laird Enterprise Trust was formed. For a short while, the building became an enterprise incubator, community hub and advisory centre with opportunities and apprenticeships for local people.

Image courtesy of Philly Letters

LAIRD ENTERPRISE HELPS LOCAL FIRMS

LIKE the Phoenix itself, the old Laird School of Art building in Birkenhead has risen from the ashes.

Just a couple of years ago, it lay empty and a victim of vandalism. Today, there's a refreshingly different story to tell.

Now known as the Laird Enterprise Trust Association, it is helping local businesses take shape and be self-supporting.

There's free 'pop in' advice on Enterprise Allowance, Book Keeping, Tax, and Cash flow. And much more besides!

The spacious building has workshop areas, helping people launch into business by getting their ideas off the ground for a small rent. So if you've ever thought about starting your own little earner, the time's been more right! Call in and make yourself at home - over a coffee in the snack bar.

The Laird Enterprise Trust Association has a team of highly experienced advisors at your disposal - 'Laird Enterprises' - Alan, John, and Christine, offering friendly assistance to those who want to become their own boss. Or simply use the building as a 'stopping off' point for business planning.

It's doors are open for YOUR kind of business idea, and since the building has had a new use, small companies from pottery to plumbing, flower arranging to

motor repair have been given the driving force they need.

No-one pretends that starting a business is easy. Those early days can be a real headache! But with the helping hand of the Laird Enterprise Trust Association, you're half way to success.

They have even formed a small community company, on a charitable basis, with representatives including local residents, enterprises using workshop space in the building, Wirral Borough Council, and the Town and Country Planning Association.

Says Carol-Anne Ravenscroft: "We believe the trial workshop facilities are helping the unemployed take steps with confidence. We're also going out to Job Clubs and centres where

the unemployed meet, giving informal talks about self-employment."

"We've found that unemployment can trap people into poor motivation and the self-confidence to build up a network of valuable contacts."

The Laird Enterprise Trust Association has built up that valuable network. Their success is a partnership with local accountants, contacts, bank managers, and solicitors. Close links have also been forged with the Prince's Youth Business Trust.

The Association is limited by guarantee with charitable status. Funding for an advice team ceases in March, so they are looking for local sponsors to keep the facilities open for local entrepreneurs.

"Good information is

essential when you're getting a business off the ground, and we want our service to grow, so experienced staff can continue to guide business ideas. What we're offering is a vital service to the community. A friendly service to those who may feel they are put off by the pin-striped-suit brigade!" adds Carol-Anne.

The Laird School of Art's doors are open again. Go through them and enter an exciting new world of business initiatives. If you've got enquiries, suggestions, offers of help, or are just naturally curious, you'll be most welcome.

The building is opposite Birkenhead Park in Park Road North. Or ring Carol-Anne, John, or Alan on 653 6777. It's there to help you. Use it!



Image courtesy of Philly Letters

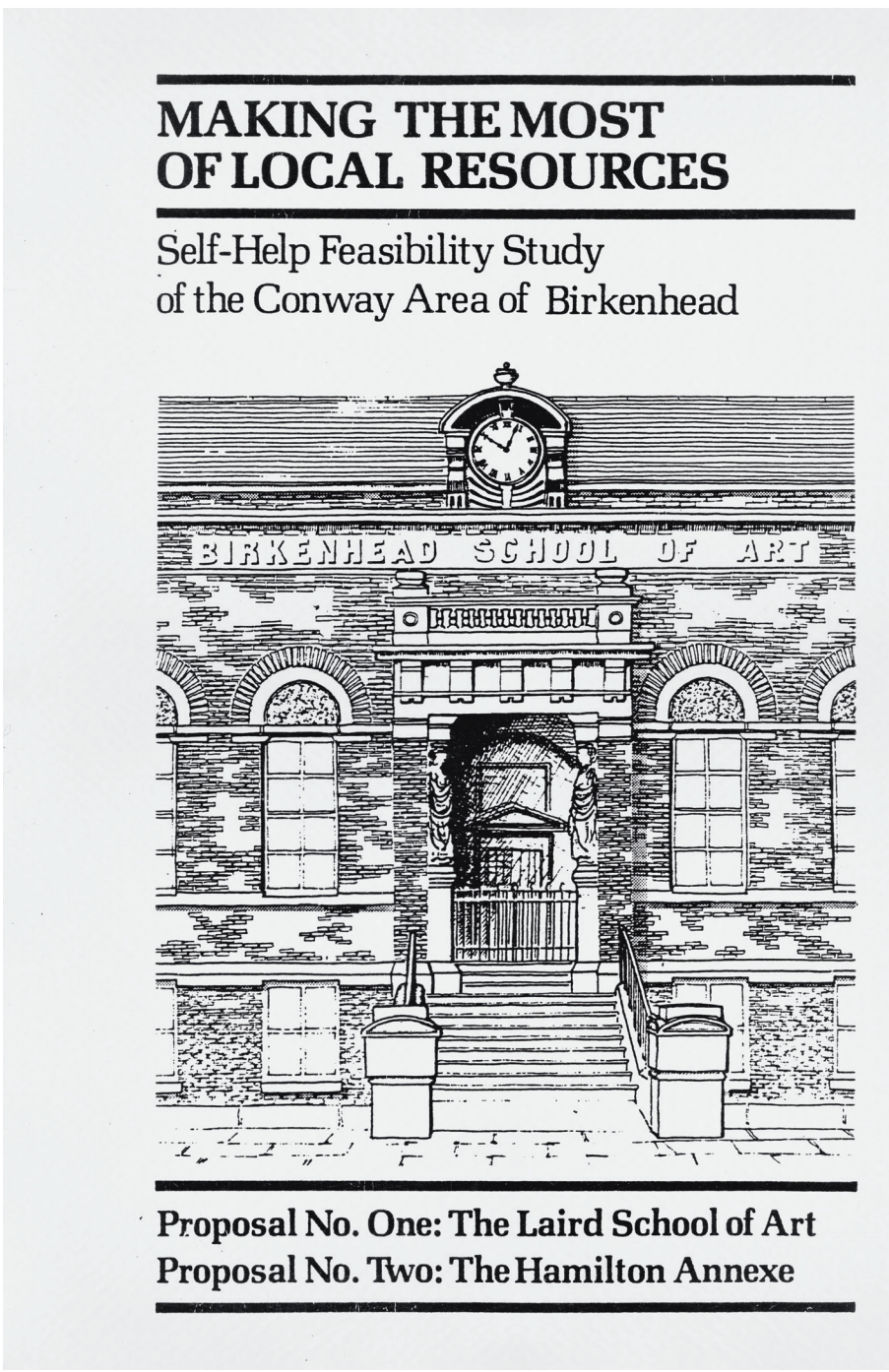


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Rotten luck

The project won the **Times/RIBA Community Enterprise Award** in 1986 and was celebrated in the local and national press. However, activities were soon halted by the discovery of dry rot

in the building, which the Trust could not afford, nor raise funds to remedy. This discovery led to the dispersal of activities and eventual disbanding of the Trust in 1990.

