

**Report Title:** Strategic Position - Scrutiny Review of Affordable Workspace in Lewes District  
**Report To:** Scrutiny Panel on Affordable Workspace **Date:** 20 April 2018  
**Report By:** Kerry Barrett, Regeneration Project Manager

## Background

Sally Staples (SS), Cultural Strategy Manager at East Sussex County Council (ESCC) was invited to attend a Panel meeting on the Scrutiny Review of Affordable Workspace in the Lewes District.

Her knowledge was deemed valuable to collate evidence to address the objectives of the scrutiny review, in particular the first:

1. How can Lewes District Council engage and influence South East Creative Economy Network (SECEN) and other strategic partnerships to support the development of affordable workspace?
2. What can Lewes District Council do better to support creative businesses?
3. How effective are the commercial property databases, and the Locate East Sussex service in searching for affordable, and creative workspace?

SS represents ESCC on and co-chairs SECEN, a South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) sub-group; and facilitates Culture East Sussex (CES), a sub-group of Team East Sussex (TES).

SS was unable to accept the invitation. ESCC deemed it more appropriate for Officers at Lewes District Council (LDC) to present the work of the SECEN, CES and ESCC and circulate the relevant strategic paperwork for review.

The purpose of this report is to respond to the Panel's proposed interview questions to SS to address the objectives of the review.

Any queries or further questions raised by the Panel in response to this report will be taken by Officers from LDC to ESCC.

## QUESTIONS

**Could you please provide an overview of your area of work including the functions of the different partnerships?**

### CES

SS is the Cultural Strategy Manager at ESCC. Her core role is delivering the East Sussex Cultural Strategy and facilitating CES. The Strategy is available to download via: <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/media/1320/countywide-cultural-strategy-ebook.pdf>.

The three priorities of the strategy and CES are:

- Create an environment where great cultural experiences are available to everyone to enhance their quality of life.
- Create an environment which enables the cultural and creative economy to expand and enhances our ability to attract and retain other businesses.
- Develop and promote well packaged cultural tourism offers which celebrate the identity of East Sussex, raise its profile and attract more visitors and businesses to the County.

LDC is represented on CES by Phil Evans, Director of Tourism & Enterprise. Rob Cottrill, Chief Executive has expressed an interest in attending future CES meetings.

### SECEN

SS represents ESCC on and co-chairs SECEN.

Established in 2013, SECEN works to accelerate growth in the digital, creative and cultural sector. It is a working partnership between local authorities, creative businesses and education bodies across SELEP. SECEN identifies barriers to growth and implements practical and scalable initiatives to overcome these barriers.

SECEN has developed a vision for the creative sector within the SELEP area which is available to download via: <http://www.southeastlep.com/activities/south-east-creative-economy-network> The Prospectus sets out a portfolio of sector-led initiatives to build a more self-sustaining, creative and cultural infrastructure in the South East.

SECEN has identified a shortage of appropriate workspace as a barrier to growth and has developed a plan 'Towards a South East Creative Economy Workspace Masterplan' which is available to download via <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/eastsussex/selep/secen/>. It makes the case for investment in creative open workspace to support the growth of the creative economy across the SELEP area.

The key actions in the Masterplan for SECEN to address are:

- Identify a minimum of three Creative Enterprise Zones.
- Create a pipeline of projects through an investment strategy and toolkit.
- Research and present existing and new options for financial and governance models.
- Develop cultural planning policy that can be adopted by local authorities to support the inclusion of creative workspace in new developments and the re-purposing of under-used buildings as creative workspace.
- Create a SELEP-wide open workspace property portfolio.
- Continue to grow the evidence base.

### **According to SECEN, what is meant by affordable workspace?**

SECEN use the generic term "open workspace" (in line with the IPPR report <https://www.ippr.org/publications/start-me-up-the-value-of-open-workspaces>). Open workspace includes incubators, accelerators, co-working spaces, managed workspace, makerspaces and artists' studios. Most users are microbusinesses and

a significant proportion are creative businesses; open workspaces also bring together professionals working in other sectors, including biotech, business services and the charity sector.

It is important to differentiate between the types of workspace and business models as they all offer slightly different things to meet differing business needs. Open workspaces have flexible terms of access; tenants may be members or pay-per-day, they do not need to sign a long lease, which reduces the risk to them of taking on a space. By the same token, a steady flow of multiple users means that risk to the landlord can be kept low. Some open workspaces also offer more 'dedicated' spaces that tenants can move into as they become established and scale up, and which are sometimes used to cross-subsidise other spaces.

Open workspace is the preferred model for creative businesses because sharing space and resources also reduces costs, tenants can afford higher-grade workspace, which is both preferred by staff and suitable to accommodate customers and funders. It also enables businesses to access more expensive equipment – which is especially important for artists and makers.

**According to SECEN, what is meant by creative businesses?**

SECEN refer to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) definition and industry and occupation classifications of the creative industry. See Appendix 2.

**Do you have any knowledge on the effectiveness of commercial property databases in searching for creative workspace and affordable workspace in the Lewes District?**

ESCC warmly encourage LDC to take up their standing invitation to the Locate East Sussex (LES) progress review meetings where reports on both enquiries and conversations to secured workspace are reported on.

Note – LDC is represented on the LES Sponsorship Board by Lisa Rawlinson, Strategy & Partnership Lead (Growth & Prosperity). Rob Cottrill, Chief Executive, Chairs the Board meetings.

**Apart from what types of creative workspaces listed in the SECEN Workspace Master Plan, do you have any further knowledge on space requirements which might be useful for the Review?**

Creative industries can lack visibility. Flagship buildings which bring many microbusinesses under one umbrella not only support those businesses but tell a story about the impact of the creative industries on the local economy, they send a clear signal that creative microbusinesses are welcomed and valued in the region and are immediate docking stations for creative businesses to seek out the ecosystem of complementary businesses, business support and camaraderie they need to survive. Furthermore, open workspace can lend authority to brands, supporting marketing and promotion campaigns.

The creative economy, like other sectors, has specific requirements. These requirements are often lighter on infrastructure than other sectors with less need for

purpose built buildings or increased demand on over stretched and expensive transport infrastructure. Instead they are likely to have business critical reliance on digital connectivity - a robust ultrafast digital infrastructure is crucial in both attracting businesses to workspace developments and in allowing collectives of freelancers and microbusinesses to cluster - and any new developments should incorporate this.

Equally the sector will hold out for premises which allow them to prioritise lifestyle factors such as sustainable transport options and authentic environments, ideally coupled with natural assets such as coast and countryside.

**What support (encouragement to succeed physical and non-tangible) do creative businesses need?**

Creative Open Workspace thrives where it capitalises on existing assets, both hard assets (such as suitable buildings, favourable planning policies, talent, Higher Education partnerships and knowledge, existing creative businesses) and soft assets (including talent, appealing environments offering good work/life balance and networks).

The Workspace Master Plan also highlights:

- Support and advice – purpose is to act as a supportive environment focused on growing tenants’ businesses. Open workspaces focused on addressing disadvantage typically provide services such as training opportunities to help people become self-employed or find employment.
- Peer-to-peer interaction - shared areas are designed to facilitate serendipitous meetings and collaboration, which may generate new networks, ideas, collaboration and products.
- Complementarity - Open workspaces ‘curate’ their communities by acting as gatekeepers to the space. In some cases, tenants may be welcomed because of their similarities; artists that use the same materials for instance, or community organisations and charities with common purpose. Often, however, providers will also seek a diverse, complementary mix – makers with different skill levels, graphic designers and PR companies – to create mini ecosystems of skills and interests. The purpose of creating interaction between curated users is to create peer networks that can offer advice and support, enable innovation through collaboration and knowledge exchange, and to create small supply chains within the space. This model can also support a range of charges to enable affordable workspace with more established companies committing to longer leases and paying higher rents to cross subsidize more flexible cheaper spaces.

**What support are you and SECEN aware of for creative businesses in the Lewes District and how effective are they?**

SECEN is working to ensure that there is a South East Creative Cultural and Digital Support programme (SECCADS) to support and grow creative businesses in the South East to grow the sector, increase the demand for workspace and grow the skills to create and maintain open workspace. The provision will compliment existing business support services.

In East Sussex there will be a Creative Coordinator and 2 Creative Hubs which will

## Appendix 1

be associated with pro sector friendly events.

There will also be a small scale capital grants programme to support the creation of more shared facilities.

### **How can LDC engage and influence the strategic partnerships to support the development of affordable workspace?**

LDC is warmly encouraged to take up their standing invitations to attend TES, SECEN, CES and the East Sussex Arts Partnership where this issue is regularly discussed and actions are agreed. There are also reports on existing initiatives led by strategic partners and/or the sector itself.

Involvement in SECEN is pertinent if LDC want to understand, influence and contribute to the identification of barriers to growth and the implementation of practical initiatives in the Lewes district.

Note – LDC is represented on TES by Ian Fitzpatrick, Director of Regeneration and Planning, and represented on the East Sussex Arts Partnership by Jackie Blackwell, Manager for Tourism and Arts.