



Lewes District Council

Scrutiny Affordable Workspace in the Lewes District Panel

Minutes of meeting held in Telscombe Room - Southover House, Lewes on 4 October 2018 at 10.00 am

Present:

Councillors Joanna Carter (Chair) and Vic lent

Officers in attendance:

Kerry Barrett, (Regeneration Project Manager) Philip Evans (Director of Tourism & Enterprise), Peter Sharp (Head of Regeneration) and Jazmin Victory (Committee Officer)

Also in attendance:

Chelsea Renton, Lewes Phoenix Rising
Oliver Lowenstein, Making Lewes

1 Minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2018 were approved as a correct record by the Chair.

2 Apologies for Absence/Declaration of Substitute Members

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor O'Keeffe.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

4 Urgent Items

There were none.

5 Written Questions from Councillors

There were none.

6 Review of Affordable Workspaces in the Lewes District (End Users)

In order to understand what the Council could do better to support creative businesses, the panel invited representatives from the following organisations to attend this meeting and contribute to the review:

Lewes phoenix Rising;

Making Lewes; and
Devonshire Collective.

Prior to the meeting, the following set of questions were circulated to the invitees:

1. Could you please provide us with an overview of your area of work?
2. What other networks do you collaborate with?
3. According to your network, what is meant by affordable workspace?
4. Could you please describe the workspace needs – including specialist equipment, tenancy agreement and size, of creative businesses?
5. What are the barriers for creative businesses looking to start-up or explain in the Lewes District?
6. What business support do creative enterprises need?
7. What business support services are you aware of for your business in the Lewes District and how effective are they, in particular for creative businesses?
8. If anyone in your network has ever used commercial property databases to search for affordable workspace and creative workspaces in the Lewes District, which ones and how effective were they?
9. Could you please provide us with a list of known affordable workspaces and creative workspaces in the Lewes District to help us map the current supply?

Lewes Phoenix Rising

In preparation for the meeting, Lewes Phoenix Rising had conducted a survey during September which focused on the workspace needs of those creative industries in and around Lewes Town. The survey was distributed via the Lewes Phoenix Rising email list (1,500 recipients) and Lewes Phoenix Rising social media (760 followers). The survey had 100 completed responses and the results have been incorporated into the answers below. A copy of the presentation will be uploaded alongside the minutes.

Could you please provide us with an overview of your area of work?

Lewes Phoenix Rising was a development company set up by local people working to secure genuinely affordable homes and workspaces in Lewes.

According to your network, what was meant by affordable workspace?

Most survey respondents were looking to pay less than £7.50 per square feet per annum for space which fit their specification (see answer below) – and typically needed less than 250 square feet.

Could you please describe the workspace needs of creative businesses?

Various sizes were needed depending on the craft which ranged from sculptors, 3-D designers and jewellery makers to performance artists. The survey results highlighted that the priority was for a basic, insulated space with utilities, parking, ground floor access and good security. Daylight, shared machinery, communal areas and the potential for configuring spaces to the businesses individual were also important. The majority of respondents

sought to work within 2 miles of home – but would travel further for affordable workspaces.

What were the barriers for creative businesses looking to start-up or expand in Lewes District?

- The lack of available workspaces which provided a cross section of industries working together and allowed for networking opportunities;
- The lack of short-term and flexible rental opportunities;
- The shortage of basic concrete spaces which allowed for the more ‘messy’ creative businesses to have a space to work; and
- That the farm houses and barns that some businesses were investing in had no planning permission so there was no certainty for their future.

Had anyone in your network ever used commercial property databases to search for affordable workspace and creative workspaces in the Lewes District?

16% of survey respondents had used agents and databases to find workspaces, but most of the results were not suitable due to space/cost. This low success rate was seen as a reflection of the lack of suitable properties available rather than the search mechanism.

What business support do creative enterprises need?

Chelsea stressed the importance of regarding creative businesses as jobs rather than hobbies; for a majority of the creative businesses within Lewes Phoenix Rising’s network the end goal was financial gain, and therefore the business support needed was for practical advice such as business rates.

What business support services are you aware of for your business in the Lewes District and how effective are they, in particular for creative businesses?

Whilst they were aware of the South East Creative Economy Network, this was not used widely.

Was digital connectivity seen as a priority?

The importance of digital connectivity varied throughout the creative industry.

Further suggestions arising for the panel’s consideration included:

- That the Council supports rural diversification and actively helps farmers to allow their disused buildings to be rented out as affordable workspaces; and
- That the Council evaluates empty buildings within the District and considers making these spaces available to the creative sector, whether that would be on a long-term or short-term contract.

Making Lewes

Could you please provide us with an overview of your area of work?

Making Lewes was a community organisation that promoted the exchange of knowledge in the fields of Making, Architecture, Design and Sustainability.

According to your network, what is meant by affordable workspace?

Low cost accommodation for the creative industries that competes with the open market.

Could you please describe the workspace needs of creative businesses?

An ideal workspace for creative business is a makerspace – also known as a fab lab, or hackerspace, which allowed people with common interests to work in the same building, socialise, collaborate and ultimately build a community.

What were the barriers for creative businesses looking to start-up or expand in Lewes District?

Finance was a key barrier for start-ups in Lewes District, and often equipment which brings visions to life or allowed them to expand their businesses was too expensive. A makerspace would be effective in solving this problem because it would provide shared technology/equipment.

Had anyone in your network ever used Locate East Sussex to search for affordable workspace and creative workspaces in the Lewes District?

Locate East Sussex was helpful for bigger businesses but it did not engage with smaller businesses or provide alternative paces such as disused barns.

Further suggestions arising for the panel's consideration included:

- That Santon should consult with end users of the creative workspace planned for North Street Quarter prior to design, to ensure that the market has an input, and ensures the space created would be useful to the creative industry.
- That the Council provides more information regarding what additional services were available to businesses that formerly resided in North Street Quarter and are still seeking affordable workspaces following the end of their contracts.

Devonshire Collective

Could you please provide us with an overview of your area of work?

Devonshire Collective was a creative and cultural hub in Devonshire Ward, Eastbourne with studios, makerspaces, workshops, gallery and café for the benefit of artists, community members and the wider public.

According to your network, what is meant by affordable workspace?

Good value (cheaper than what was commercially available); flexible; provides shared resources such as kitchen and toilet facilities; Wi-Fi enabled; allows short-term rental opportunities and break clauses to leases.

Could you please describe the workspace needs of creative businesses?

- Access to funding opportunities and signposting
- Business support activities including business planning and book-keeping
- Marketing and awareness
- Communication and dialogue with like-businesses/network support
- 'Beacon' businesses which offer examples of best-practice
- Awareness of statutory responsibilities
- Access to training
- 'Kick-start' support; payment 'holidays'; support with cash flow

What were the challenges/successes of Devonshire Collective?

Challenges	Successes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity • Engagement with local residents • Turnover of artists and residents • Location and reputation of Seaside • Sustainable resourcing/allocation of resources • Lack of dedicated EBC officer support • Engagement beyond Devonshire ward • (Historic) Relationship with Towner • Competition (both café and community centre space) • Scale/viability of spaces • Split sites • Multi-cultural audiences • Long-term planning and advance promotion • Dealing with inexperienced businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varied and well-recognised programme • Work experience and college placements • Extensive volunteer network • Guest Curators programme • Regional media attention • Near-full work space component • Some sell out events at DC1 • Attracting inward investment and business development in Seaside

Could a project such as the Devonshire Collective work in the Lewes District?

Whilst no areas in the Lewes District were similar to Devonshire Ward, a potential area for a similar project could be Newhaven. Due to the transient population of Devonshire Ward, it was easier to sustain grants which helped with cash flow for the project – but this may not be the case if a similar project was undertaken in Lewes.

If Lewes District were to begin a project such as the Devonshire Collective, what would you advise be done differently?

- A 5 year plan instead of 3 year plan to accommodate the long term needs of the businesses, raising awareness for the project, and engagement with local residents;
- More consideration for the workspace sizes and locations; bigger units would allow for workshops or classes which could add an additional revenue opportunity for the project; and
- A dedicated arts development officer for additional support.

Further suggestions arising for the panel's consideration included:

- That Lewes as a hub for craft based tourism be considered as a viable investment for the Council.

Resolved:

1. Members thanked Chelsea Renton (Lewes Phoenix Rising), Oliver Lowenstein (Making Lewes) and Phil Evans (on behalf of Devonshire Collective) for attending the meeting and contributing to the review;
2. That, regarding rural diversification, officers would liaise with the Head of Planning regarding whether anything could be included in the Local Plan Part 2; and
3. That officers would pass comments, feedback and suggestions on to Locate East Sussex regarding the business support that creative enterprises needed.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm

Councillor Carter