

CREATIVE ENTERPRISE: A STRATEGY FOR HUNTINGDONSHIRE

Introduction

Creative enterprise offers the potential to be a major key to sustained economic growth in the UK. Creative businesses depend on individual creativity and skill to generate prosperity. They extend from music through marketing and advertising, architecture, furniture-making and software design. Such industries account for about 7% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and are growing at 10% per annum. In Britain, with rapid advances in digital technology and continuing development of information and communication technologies, the importance of cultural products and creative industries continues to grow. Creative businesses are important in their own right and support the development of existing and new businesses.

The National, Regional and Local Context

The **United Kingdom** has great creative strengths: around 2 million people are employed in creative industries, which have helped to transform many urban areas (Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle/Gateshead). The Government has set out clearly the links between creativity and business performance and argues that creativity is a key ingredient in the success of business across the UK economy. The UK has a world-leading creative sector directly contributing 8% to UK GDP. Recent trends show that culture is a powerful economic driver, as well making an acknowledged contribution to social, environmental, educational and health well-being.

The Government's aim is to make the UK the world's creative hub, but faces major challenges from India, China, Korea and elsewhere. The Government has invested in education through specialist schools, universities and business schools, and is seeking to provide schoolchildren with opportunities to develop creativity and take part in cultural activities. It is strongly linked to changes in the curriculum to support enterprise.

In the **Eastern Region** there are some 17,000 creative businesses employing 145,000 people – about 5.5% of the Regional workforce. The average business size is 4 and about 35% are freelance. The East of England Creative Industries Strategy identifies three regional hubs – Cambridge (new technology and innovation), Norwich (animation, TV production, writing and visual arts) and Hertfordshire (film and media).

In **Huntingdonshire** 2,000 people are employed in creative industries – about 3.2% of the workforce – the 8th largest in the Eastern Region. The number of people employed in this sector has grown by 23% in the last ten years – although this is below the regional and national average growth rate. The Community Strategy for Huntingdonshire and the Local Economy Strategy both identify creativity in our businesses as a key issue to maintaining economic success. They specifically identify St Neots as having the potential to support and benefit from a growth in creative industries.

What are Creative Industries?

The generally accepted definition of creative industries is –

“Those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the exploitation of intellectual property.”

They include — advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, photography, publishing, software and computer services, television and radio.

The definition makes a distinction between cultural and artistic activity and that which seeks to be commercially viable, but there is a close economic relationship with the cultural sector such as arts and entertainment, heritage, hospitality, museums and galleries and sport.

Creative enterprise exist where creativity and ideas can be turned into businesses and marketed, and as such have a direct link to economic and cultural development, regeneration and social inclusion. The environment in which creative industries are likely to grow will be one where cultural well-being is likely to flourish. This presents an opportunity to promote broader cultural and social objectives through the promotion of creative industries.

Strategic Aims

The purpose of this strategy is to promote two main aims —

- to increase the sustainability, growth and productivity of creative industries;
- to maximise the potential for creative industries to contribute towards broader social, economic and cultural regeneration.

Issues

Drawing on national, regional and local research, a number of key issues facing the creative sector have been identified —

- the sector is “hard to see”, its strength hasn’t been generally realised and it needs a higher profile;
- the sector is very fragmented or disconnected. The benefits for cross-fertilisation, collaboration and the transfer of knowledge between businesses is not well advanced;
- limited networks reduce both business and individual awareness of activities and opportunities;
- poor local and regional supply chains are stifling potential;
- there is a need for space in city and town centres including incubation units, where businesses can join together to share overheads and provide a focus for activity;
- in common with all businesses, creative industries need excellent management, marketing, leadership but often lack specialist business support such as help with the protection, exploitation and sharing of intellectual property;

- finance is hard to obtain from many traditional sources as creative businesses have few fixed or tangible assets.

Actions to deal with the issues

To achieve the strategic aims, a 6 point partnership programme of activity is proposed along the themes of —

- appropriate physical **infrastructure** – ‘**Spaces for Creativity**’ to nurture and harness creative industries;
- **skills and education** – in particular to help foster creativity in places of learning and in communities;
- **business support**, access to finance and protection of intellectual property - nurturing new businesses and helping them thrive;
- **competition and collaboration** - to support competitive and collaborative business environment;
- **technology** - to maximise the opportunities offered by the Internet, digitalisation and the application of new technologies;
- **removing the barriers** – minimising barriers for innovative creators and enterprise.

Detailed activities include –

- to improve business-to-business networks and information and contacts for creative businesses;
- to promote the profile and strength of creative industries in Huntingdonshire;
- to work with partners to coordinate business support, promote training and professional development programmes for individuals and businesses within creative industries;
- to improve employment creation in the sector;
- to help develop collaboration, supply chains and new markets;
- to seek to promote available funding to maximise the sustainability, productivity and establishment of creative industries.
- to develop St Neots as a district centre for creative industries;
- to work with partners to provide the physical infrastructure – “Spaces for Creativity” – in St Neots, particularly the establishment of a creative industries centre on the Longsands College campus and workspace in St Mary’s Urban Village and as part of the redevelopment of the Priory Centre;
- to promote skills initiatives to support creative industries in the Eynesbury and Eaton Socon Ward; and
- to monitor the size, economic value and social impact of creative industries in Huntingdonshire to provide an evidence base for future initiatives.

Why St Neots?

The development of a district-based creative industries hub in St Neots will help to ensure that the economic benefits from the regional centre in Cambridge can be linked with opportunities for job creation and economic regeneration throughout the Cambridge Sub-Region generally and Huntingdonshire specifically.

St Neots is the largest town in Cambridgeshire (with a population of 27,000 which is set to rise to 30,000 by 2011) and is located in the London – Stansted – Cambridge – Peterborough growth area. It is 15 miles from the regional hub of Cambridge. It also has convenient links with Hertfordshire and London.

Each day 6,000 residents leave the St Neots area to work in Cambridge, London and elsewhere, many of whom will be employed in creative industries.

Both the secondary schools in the town have been awarded Specialist Status for creativity – St Neots Community College is a Performing Arts School, while Longsands College is a specialist in Media, IT and English. Huntingdonshire Regional College has an Annexe in St Neots and has acknowledged excellence in photography. The link between secondary and further education and business is seen as an important driver in promoting creative industries.

The “Vision for St Neots – A Town of the Future” prepared by the Civic Trust in association with DTZ/Pieda, identified the opportunity to grow and diversify the local economy through creative industries. Creative industries are seen as complementary to other aspects of the re-development of the town, such as the ‘St Mary’s Urban Village’ and the Priory Centre. They would also provide a focus for skill development and employment generation particularly (but not exclusively) for young people and for other areas of the regeneration of the town, such as Eynesbury and Eaton Socon wards which have relatively high levels of deprivation.

The development of jobs and businesses in creative industries will provide employment opportunities to balance the growth in population resulting from new housing growth and the decline in employment opportunities in older established industries.

A steering group has been established in the town to promote creative industries, which is helping to build support and impetus and identify approaches to achieving the actions identified to deliver the strategic aims.

References

Department of Culture, Media and Science website:
www.culture.gov.uk/creative_industries

The East of England Creative & Cultural Industries Development Strategy