Webinar: Creative workspace and area-based regeneration

4 June 2025

Facilitated by Paul Fallon. Featuring East Street Arts founders and key speakers from Hull, Luton and Middlesbrough.

- Jon Wakeman, Artistic Director, East Street Arts
- Karen Watson, co-founder, East Street Arts
- Peter Heslip, Director of Visual Arts, Arts Council England
- Paul Holloway, Arts & Culture Manager, Hull City Council
- Marie Kirbyshaw, Chief Executive, The Culture Trust, Luton
- Gaye Kirby, Head of Culture, Middlesbrough Council
- Michelle McPhee, Strategic Town Centre Manager, Middlesbrough Council
- Anna Byrne, Director, Creative Factory, Middlesbrough

Overview

- Over 110 participants attended the webinar, highlighting strong interest in creative workspace and regeneration from local and regional government and arts agencies across England.
- Arts Council England emphasises creative industries as a key driver for future economic growth, with ongoing discussions to support the sector at a government level.
- East Street Arts' model shows the importance of permanence in creative spaces to foster trust and collaboration among artists, with over 12 years of delivering meanwhile spaces.
- Affordable workspace rates are critical, averaging £16 per square foot per annum, yet 80% of studio spaces are insecure meanwhile provisions.
- Hull's Fruit Market transformation illustrates the risks of gentrification, with creative spaces being priced out, indicating the need for secure ownership by arts users.
- Lessons from Hull's regeneration stress the changing council attitudes towards artists' low incomes and recognising creative spaces' value beyond city centres.
- Luton Culture Trust secured £3.9 million from the Local Growth Fund, demonstrating successful funding strategies and approaches for the arts through heritage and regeneration funding.

- Middlesbrough's collaborative approach integrates culture into town centre regeneration, showcasing effective partnerships between cultural and economic development teams.
- Future funding challenges highlighted include the need for soft loans and partnerships as traditional funding avenues become limited.
- Creative Workspace Network aims to facilitate strategic conversations and bridge gaps in knowledge, opportunities, and funding for entrepreneurial artists nationwide.

Notes

Webinar Introduction and Context Setting

- Paul Fallon welcomed over 110 registered participants from local and regional government and arts agencies across England to discuss creative workspace and regeneration
- Event organised by East Street Arts with support from Arts Council England through the Creative Workspace Network
- Focus on 'maker friendly workspace' - spaces that accommodate messy uses beyond clean office environments, including artists, makers, fabricators, designers, fashion, performing arts and photography
- Creative industries characterised by high self-employment rates (up to 80%) and portfolio careers with multiple income streams

Arts Council England Perspective

- Peter Heslip highlighted government focus on economic growth with creative industries as key to future growth
- Discussions ongoing with ministers about supporting the creative sector
- Local growth plans taking shape with new strategic authorities
- Arts Council has long invested in workspace, recognising benefits to individual artists, communities and local economies
- Challenge to broaden national conversation beyond London and Manchester opportunities

East Street Arts Model and Experience

- Jon Wakeman outlined 30+ year journey from 2,000 sf mill space to national influence with three owned buildings

- Delivered hundreds of meanwhile spaces over 12-13 years
- Key learning: permanence is crucial for building trust, confidence and networks
- Success requires three elements: local authority appetite, available buildings of suitable calibre, and arts entrepreneurial community
- Cross-sector collaboration essential - cannot work in isolation
- Five-year Guild programme supported 25 organisations across the country through Arts Council sector support

Artist Support and Development Stories

- Karen shared case study of Tanith - graduate artist provided studio space and accommodation, received mentoring and support, now working for Manchester International Festival with exhibition at Paradise Works
- Steve Miller example - painter who joined Patrick Studios in 2004, changed direction after design workshop, now collaborating on immersive projections for science research institutions
- Demonstrates how co-located workspaces provide collaboration, inspiration and platform for artists to develop practice and change direction
- Open studios and expert talks facilitate networking and new opportunities

Creative Workspace Economics and Market Failure

- Affordable workspace typically £16 per square foot per annum including service charge for stable long-term space
- Meanwhile provision dominates (80% of studio space) at two-thirds the rate but very insecure with potential 2-month notice
- Market failure in supply of longer-term studio space - doesn't command sufficient rent for private sector interest
- Not-for-profit organisations can run spaces sustainably with initial support
- Public sector role in enabling, de-risking and providing initial access to space
- Collective ambition for security of tenure, long-term stewardship and ownership by independent/not-for-profit users

Hull Case Study - Fruit Market Regeneration

- Paul Holloway described transformation of historic fruit market area near River Humber from dying wholesale trades to creative quarter

- 2010 priority lettings to 70+ creative organisations including jewellers, stonemason, visual artists, potter
- Area became hip destination through events like Freedom Festival (with Carabosse's fire performances) and Humber Street Sesh music festival
- Successful regeneration led to gentrification – over 15 years, creative spaces gradually priced out, only 2-3 original tenants remain but the council does retain use of a building that enables creative initiatives
- Now vibrant nighttime economy with restaurants, bars, wedding shops but lost original creative community
- Key lesson: need for trust ownership of buildings to ensure ongoing security for arts users, not just time-limited low-rent periods

Hull Lessons Learned and Current Challenges

- Recent loss of building with 53 artists including theatre company, pole dancers, recording studio, photographer after sale to developers
- Attitude change in council - senior managers no longer question artists' low incomes as they did 10-15 years ago
- Recognition that creative spaces don't need to be in city centre - can create destinations once established
- Newcastle examples cited - CWS warehouse now Malmaison, artist studio group offered entire block for £15,000 in 1985
- Current focus on convincing artists to work outside city centre in more affordable locations

Luton Culture Trust Model

- Marie Kirbyshaw explained trust established 2008 to run council cultural services more efficiently. The Culture Trust seeks to put culture at the heart of Luton's future.
- Started work on developing Hat District 2015, buying two hat factories not on market through negotiation
- Began with creative disruption project 2016 - public art, street parties, Mark Titchener illuminated piece visible from train
- Secured £3.9 million Local Growth Fund as seed funding, built up to £10 million capital development programme

- Key learning: speak language of funders (jobs, workspace, economy) rather than just cultural outputs
- Charities and trusts good intermediaries to translate between artists and economic development language

Luton Creative Cluster Development

- 20 creative industries in cluster across 15,000 square feet
- Pricing model from free support to £24 per square foot - 'if you can afford it, you pay it'
- Full commercial rent from some tenants supports charitable model for emerging practitioners
- Long-term vision: building income pays for not-for-profit activity
- Tenants include hat maker (Panama hats), making/production, global business, marketing, photography, fine artists, digital fashion, design, pottery, theatre companies
- Building on Luton's making heritage from 1600s hat industry, maintaining production focus

Luton Responsive Programming and Future Funding

- 'Pioneers' group established 2016 to learn from users about workspace needs and preferences
- Responsive to changing trends - currently setting up new makerspace as demand returns for equipment and sewing machines
- 'Freedom in a framework' approach - provide structure but allow organic growth
- Future funding challenges: Community Ownership Fund no longer available for building purchases
- Current strategy: refinancing existing buildings through remortgaging (risky for charity)
- Need for local authority soft loans and partnerships to enable property acquisition

Middlesbrough Collaborative Approach

- Gaye Kirby described thriving cultural partnership advocating for sector and bringing investment

- Vision for Middlesbrough embeds culture and creativity at heart of town centre regeneration
- Michelle McPhee's background: 2012 regeneration of Baker Street and Bedford Street with independent businesses, Orange Pip Market success
- Close collaboration between culture team and economic development - unusual cross-departmental working
- Recognition that town centres need diversification beyond retail to compete with online shopping and out-of-town retail parks

Middlesbrough Policy Integration and Asset Management

- Create vision for Middlesbrough - 10-year plan with strong focus on spaces, ownership and permanency
- Cultural policy incorporated into local plan renewal - first time in Middlesbrough
- Policy identifies creative clusters and areas for protection/development
- Strategic working with assets team to identify underutilised council buildings without income targets
- Recent success: Stockton Street Workshops - two artists secured peppercorn rent spaces, will revive community workshop and use outdoor space
- Michelle's role includes relationship management with private landlords to encourage creative use of empty properties

Q&A Session Key Insights

- Luton funding model explained: Culture Trust is an independent charity that receives some funding via the council-owned airport and is building up an asset base to support its inclusion work
- Creative Land Trust discussion: Anna Byrne developing model for Middlesbrough with £2 million levelling up funding
- Portfolio approach emerging in Middlesbrough: some investment properties reinvested back into sector, others available to sector through trust
- Jon Wakeman's perspective: Creative Land Trusts risk duplicating existing expertise, need to consider competition with established organisations
- Importance of getting to areas early before developers, following artists to where they want to be

Future Directions and Network Development

- Jon outlined need for longer-term strategic conversation linking experienced voices nationally
- Creative Workspace Network role in sharing knowledge and bringing people together for focused discussions
- Support for entrepreneurial artists wanting to play an active role in neighbourhood regeneration and expand beyond individual practice
- Not-for-profit artist-led organisations and networks (East Street Arts and Creative Workspace Network) have a role in bridging gaps between knowledge, opportunities and funding streams such as Towns Fund
- Examples of exciting artist-led regeneration in Middlesbrough, Barnsley, Grimsby, Keighley
- £4 million Keighley department store conversion project example of accessing regeneration rather than arts funding
- Attendees are invited to stay connected with Creative Workspace Network as it evolves and is reshaped based on their feedback

Creative space: stakeholder benefits

Creative workspaces not only advantage studio users, but also create value for the project sponsors, developers and community members.

FOR GOVERNMENTS:

- Support for the creative economy including attracting and retaining diversity and talent.
- Fostering of knowledge and innovation industries.
- Building of diverse economies.
- Placemaking and public benefit.

FOR PROPERTY OWNERS AND ASSET DEVELOPERS:

- Placemaking and activation which drives footfall.
- Community buy-in and brand building.
- Increased property values.
- Catalyst for site occupation and sales.

FOR COMMUNITIES:

- Liveable, vibrant and engaging neighborhoods.
- Opportunities for engagement and participation in creativity
- Access to education and personal development.
- Support for local creative businesses.