**DCMS Committee Enquiry**

**Organisation**: South East Local Enterprise Partnership (with South East Creative Economy Network (SECEN), a sub group of SELEP)

SELEP is a partnership for growth between business, government and education. We work together with all sectors of business, all levels of government and in partnership with key agencies to pursue and attract investment into the South East which will deliver significant economic growth. LEPs set the direction and influence the future priorities for investment in the area as part of an integrated approach to skills, business and developing our future communities.

We represent the largest LEP area in England outside London, in terms of population and economic output, and cover an area encompassing the local authority areas of East Sussex, Essex, Kent, Medway, Southend and Thurrock.

SECEN is an open, voluntary network and working group of SELEP. It was established in 2012 to become a coherent voice for the 15,000+ businesses that make up the creative industry. The network brings together businesses and freelancers with education providers, strategic organisations, and local authorities. Through action and advocacy, SECEN works to create the right conditions for the sector to achieve sustainable growth and enrich the places we live for the benefit of everyone.

For context, 18% of the South East’s high streets’ start-ups/new businesses were creative in 2020. In Brentwood, Tonbridge, Bexhill, Sevenoaks, Chatham, Hastings, Colchester, Canterbury, Folkestone and Lewes high streets, more than 15% of businesses are creative businesses.

**1. How can culture reanimate our public spaces and shopping streets?**

**a) Respond to new technology and changing work and consumption patterns**

There are increasing numbers of people working and wanting to spend time in less conventional environments: near home, in flexible workspaces, in ‘third spaces’ with a natural draw towards local high streets. High streets can become greater places for innovative, creative and sustainable businesses to locate themselves and to grow.

**b) Support creative production, collaboration and entrepreneurship**

The creative sector is mainly composed of freelancers, micro-businesses and SMEs who need access to shared space, networks and specialist equipment. The opportunity is to reshape town centres and create community partnerships, co-operatives and collectives.

**C) Provide for flexibility, experimentation and prototyping**

The process of experimentation and prototyping is important for all creative practices but can also be used as a tool to re-think high street rejuvenation. This involves making relatively low-cost, ambitious temporary interventions in order to test ideas and build consensus amongst the wide range of stakeholders involved in high street management.

The challenge is for landowners, planners and operators to provide the flexibility needed for this to happen; accommodating new types of spaces or store formats; incorporating greater adaptability in rents, lengths of lease and space configuration, new technology infrastructure such as 5G connectivity.

The changes to the planning system brought in as a response to the pandemic have greatly bolstered the ability of local authorities to act in preserving assets of cultural and community value. Here, there is a strong opportunity to constructively engage with landowners along the high street and within the town centre to understand how empty and vacant spaces could be better utilised in renewal.

Our **Creative High Streets** report, in partnership with Arts Council England, can be found [here](https://www.southeastlep.com/creative-high-streets/).

**Culture can reanimate town centres in the following ways:**

1. **Creative uses in vacant or under- used spaces**

Second Floor Studios & Arts, Sevenoaks: 19 fully occupied creative studios across the 1st and 2nd floors of a high street building in the hear t of Sevenoaks. The studios opened in 2018 as a joint venture between Second Floor Studios & Arts and Sevenoaks District Council as part of the Council’s town centre masterplan.

Hypha Studios, Eastbourne: Hypha Studios is a charity that matches creatives with empty spaces regenerating the high street through the formation of cultural hubs with programming to engage local communities. Ever y placement includes a mentoring session and the creation of a public program that directly engages with local communities, generating new footfall.

St George’s Creative Hub, Gravesend: The St George’s Creative Hub will be an arts facility in Gravesend town centre with 2, 200 sqf t flexible ground floor gallery space, an 800 sqft ground floor café area, and 761 sqft of creative co working space on the first floor. The creative hub is being delivered through the redevelopment of two adjacent retail units in a prominent location in St. George’s Shopping Centre

1. **Creative meanwhile uses**

The Coachworks, Ashford: The Coachworks is a ‘meanwhile’ development reviving disused industrial buildings. The site includes a co-working space, individual studio spaces, and flexible indoors and outdoors event space with food stalls. The Council purchased the site in 2014 and put out a call for ‘open ideas’ for an interim use.

1. **Space for makers and independent creative retailers**

The Pop-Up Club, Chelmsford: The Pop-Up Club is a social enterprise providing independent local makers, artists, and designers a platform to access the high street and grow. Having started as a monthly pop-up marketplace in Chelmsford, the Pop-Up Club opened a permanent store in Chelmsford in 2020 and is now expanding to Brighton and Manchester. The store in Chelmsford sells ethically-sourced gifts, homeware, arts and fashion from local businesses.

**d) High street cultural programming**

Hastings HAZ Cultural Programming, Hastings: As part of the High Street Heritage Action Zone programme led by Historic England, a consortium of creative organisations is leading a programme of cultural activities aimed at breathing new life into the town centre. The Cultural Programme features new digital and physical art works and podcast series inspired by the nation’s high streets. Commissioned artists also work with local communities on high streets across England to co-produce art works.

1. **Culture and night-time economy**

Elsewhere, Margate: Elsewhere is a record store, car, café and music venue occupying a retail unit in The Centre, Margate. Since it opened in 2018 Elsewhere has become an important part of the Kent music scene showcasing local talent as well as attracting some of the biggest up and coming bands. It has acted as an agent for change in the shopping centre, generating footfall and new businesses.

Canterbury Purple Flag: Purple Flag is a night-time economy accreditation, showing the town centre meets the standards of excellence in managing its night-time economy. The scheme takes into consideration safety, movement including transport and pedestrian routes, diversity of the night-time of fer, placemaking, and local policy. In Canterbury, the Purple Flag accreditation process is managed by the Canterbury BID.

1. **Creative skills building**

Future Foundry, Dover: Future Foundry is a Dover-based community interest company which stands behind markets and other projects focused on removing barriers to progression for young people in the creative industries and supporting the transition from education to a career or further training. Future Foundry’s projects include Student Makers’ Market, a popular pop-up market which provides real life, street-based business training for young creatives across Kent. The Makers’ Market offers young creatives free stalls to test products and business ideas, alongside training sessions on market trading, presentation, production, business modelling, finance, or sign writing.

1. **Tactics**

There are a number of tactics demonstrating some of the innovations in re-purposing and letting of spaces for cultural and creative uses and that could support greater flexibility, risk mitigation, and collaboration between stakeholders:

* **Meanwhile activation**: This should be a window of opportunity to test, prototype and capacity build a future use or activity.
* **Services contracts**: Owners, including local authorities, can negotiate terms which form part of the lease and outline the social value, services and programming that the operator or end tenant will provide.
* **Business Rates strategy**: Discretionary Business Rates relief for creative spaces and meanwhile uses in pre-development sites can be implemented.
* **Multi-use and hybrid spaces**: multi-use buildings allow for cross-subsidy between different uses and enable hybrid and innovate business models.
* **Flexible lease length**: Low risk leases for tenants, allowing start-up creative businesses or organisations to fail and grow.
* **Turnover rents**: Rent agreement between landlord and tenant based on turnover of tenant.
* **Consortium asset management**: a vehicle by which multiple landowners can partner with an operator to manage their vacant assets.
* **Empty property tax**: a taxation system for empty properties, which could be combined with business grants to allow for tenants to move in.

**2. How can creatives contribute to local decision-making and planning of place?**

The Pioneering Places project in East Kent was an exemplar project testing and demonstrating creative-led approaches in Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone and Ramsgate, designed to encourage local people to get involved and shape the place where they live. Each project identified different heritage sites that had lost their function or were otherwise forgotten, derelict or overlooked. Local communities were empowered to reconnect with each site, inspired by artists, informed by historians and supported by architects and planners to explore bold new visions for what each place could be.

<https://culturalplacemaking.com/>

There is also ongoing work to create a Creative Workspace Masterplan, which is bringing together private and public sector representatives to accelerate the pipeline of open workspace projects, and to inform cultural planning policy guidance to support the inclusion of creative workspace in new developments and repurposing of under-used buildings as creative workspace.

**3. How can the Government support places without established artistic infrastructure to take full advantage of the opportunities that the levelling up agenda provides?**

In Ebbsfleet Garden City, Kent a three-year programme called ‘This Must Be the Place’ is designing and testing approaches to community, youth and art-led creativity, impacting on public spaces to make them the heart of the development of the new town.

Through a process of community co-production and cultural co-location commissioned creative practitioners are activating new communities to develop a vision and cultural programme for the new town. Cultural infrastructure is being developed to co-locate alongside public and community services, encouraging creative organisations to locate in the new town and benefit from a new, mutually beneficial alliance with health, education and wellbeing providers.

In the Thames Estuary, a place with weak cultural infrastructure, there was the opportunity to benefit from a closer working relationship with London as a cultural sector global leader. A strong partnership that uniquely communicated across bureaucratic boundaries and included local authorities, the LEP, and the sector created a shared vision, The Thames Estuary Production Corridor, and developed a [business case for investment.](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.southeastlep.com%2Fapp%2Fuploads%2F2020%2F07%2FSECEN_tepc_case_for_investment_2020-compressed.pdf&data=04%7C01%7C%7C242aef817cd24733426208d9f2fb0f22%7Ca8b4324f155c4215a0f17ed8cc9a992f%7C0%7C1%7C637807982413265111%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=kTHfGzCFbWbBNqd%2BRoSLty2b9oYx0Biko4AK2qhOrQ8%3D&reserved=0) This secured two funding streams - Creative Development Fund (CDF) and a MHCLG grant - and supported the setting up of a programme, Creative Estuary, and a staff member.  Markers for success were:

- A partnership that includes local decision makers and sector representation

- A platform for sharing knowledge and progress

- A shared vision and data-based business case

- Delivery structure and sector leadership.

**4. How might changes to the UK’s broadcasting landscape affect investment in cultural production outside the capital, and what could the consequences be for artists and communities?**

**5. How should Government build on existing schemes, such as the UK City of Culture, to level up funding for arts and culture?**

**a) Support Cultural Opportunity Zones (COZ’s)** trial in the Southeast

COZ’s establish a new investment model for local creative economy development where the creative industries and cultural sector are championed for their role in driving inclusive growth, enhancing the quality of place and delivering positive spill over benefits. A COZ is a flexible development tool and cultural investment vehicle exploiting alignment of policy and investment in a defined geographic area.

It will encourage the introduction of affordable cultural and creative infrastructure, including workspaces, talent and skills development, amenities and platforms for cultural and creative production and consumption. It will also provide wider support for creative professionals, businesses and freelancers to put down roots at local level, scale up and grow.

Based on, but different to the Enterprise Zone model, COZ’s will be defined by typologies that require similar responses including High Streets and post-industrial areas.

**b) Embed the development of accessible cultural infrastructure and activity into the national   
 planning framework** for all larger scale residential development.

Through our experience on the Pioneering Places project, and in new towns Ebbsfleet and Otterpool, Kent and in Purfleet in Thurrock which are all areas that suffer from significant levels of deprivation requiring levelling up – we present an ideal opportunity to trial the approach.

1. **Continue to develop cultural tourism as a primary driver post-pandemic attracting overseas visitors and to generate local pride.**

England's Creative Coast (EEC) was an innovative multi-layered partnership project delivering outdoor art, local engagement programmes, international and national marketing campaigns all of which connected the outstanding places across the South East’s stunning coastline of Sussex, Kent and Essex, tempting new visitors to the region. It took place from April 2021 to November 2021.

ECC commissioned new work by some of the world’s leading artists, uncovered the creative spirit of each place as told by the locals that live there, unveiled the world’s first geocaching digital treasure hunt, and developed on-line self-build itineraries that included food, travel and accommodation. It achieved significant international acclaim, increased local visitors to places (despite the significant challenges of COVID) and enabled local people to connect and celebrate their local places.

More information about SECEN and its work can be found [here](https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2021/09/SECEN-Statement-of-Intent-FINAL.pdf).