

1

Rural Regeneration Zone - Case Study No.1 A study into creative workspace provision

"We are very pleased to be associated with this study and its findings which highlight the important role played by the creative industries sector in the RRZ. I look forward to seeing the recommendations of the study being implemented and resulting in real and lasting benefit for this important part of the region."

Ian Danby, Arts Council,
West Midlands



Background

This study was launched to consider whether there was a need for capital investment to boost the supply of studio/workspace for creative industries. It was commissioned by the RRZ, working with the local strategic partnerships (LSPs) of Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

Supporting the creative industries was flagged up as a priority area in the Zone Implementation Plan for 2006-09. This was because a key part of the plan was to invest in activity that would help diversify the economy towards higher-waged and knowledge-intensive jobs.

Objectives

The study's main objectives were:

- Assessing business demand for creative workspace in the two sub-sectors
- Auditing current provision
- Identifying the kind of creative workspace in demand
- Highlighting ways of providing such workspace
- Identifying locations
- Putting together evidence on rentals and what the market could bear.

The study's focus

The study focused on two sub-sectors – craft workers (also known as designer-makers) and media, which included new media and digital enterprises. It covered businesses at all stages of development, from start-ups to mature companies.

The decision to prioritise these two sub-sectors was taken by the LSP representatives.

While the study's main focus was the RRZ area, it also looked beyond these boundaries to the three counties as a whole.



Findings

The key findings were:

- There is demand for creative workspace from students, new graduates and start-ups. Further and higher education institutions are beginning to look at ways of responding to this need.
- There is a high level of homeworking among creative businesses in the sub-region. This has become viable for media businesses because of the roll out of broadband in the region. For example, the RRZ is supporting Enterprise Local in Shropshire, a scheme to provide support to people working from home.
- Among established businesses there is little demand for conventional workspace. But there is demand for shared multi-use locations, such as space that can be used for meetings, seminars and office hot-desking. There was also demand for space providing equipment and production facilities. The RRZ is already taking steps to help meet this demand, through its plans to develop a network of enterprise facilities and multi-use centres.

Conclusions

Among the main conclusions and recommendations were:

- There is not enough demand to justify investment in providing conventional creative workspace.
- Work is ongoing to collate and present information about provision and making it more easily accessible.
- Higher and further education institutions have a key role to play in assisting new graduate start-ups in the area.
- There is a need for hub facilities, where similar businesses can network and share space. This reflects the desire expressed by businesses for multi-use space that could be used for meetings, collaborative working or shared production.

What happens now

The findings of the study are now being taken forward as separate actions by organisations represented on the project's steering group.

Rural Regeneration Zone

The Rural Regeneration Zone (RRZ) was set up by Advantage West Midlands to deliver the regional economic strategy in rural areas. It is the only one of the six regeneration zones to focus on non-urban communities and is unique in England.

The RRZ covers most of Herefordshire and Shropshire and some of Worcestershire. It is overseen by a board made up of representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors.



Rural Regeneration Zone, Unit 3, Alliance Court, Ludlow Eco Business Park, Eco Park Road, Ludlow, Shropshire, SY8 1ES

Tel: +44(0)1584 819 238 Fax: +44(0)1584 810 469 Email: rrz@advantagewm.co.uk

www.ruralregenerationzone.org.uk