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SELEP/ACE CREATIVE HIGH STREETS
STAKEHOLDERS BRIEFING NOTE | 11-06-2021

SELEP/ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

CREATIVE HIGH STREETS

The project

The Creative and Cultural sector as driver for the future of high streets in the South East.

Overview

We Made That and PRD have been appointed by SELEP and Arts Council England to develop a better understanding of how cultural and creative organisations can be embedded in high streets and drive their reinvigoration and reinvention. The research will lead to the production of a narrative report which will inform and direct future initiatives and ensure that maximised outcomes can be realised from a range of interventions. The development of the narrative will be informed by a series of high street case studies which will explore a range of innovative actions, strategies and methods that could better unlock positive and inclusive growth for the region.

The narrative report is expected to help SELEP's partners and stakeholders locate culture as a key tool, as well as establish the creative sector as a key partner, in the approach to planning and place-making, recovery, growth and community development which will support the case for investment in high streets across SELEP. It will present a strategic case for action, introduce a shared approach to understanding and measuring success, and support collaboration across the SELEP geographies in terms of funding and sharing the delivery of expertise and good practices. It is expected to be a practical document which will support local authorities, creative organisations, developers and operators in establishing a roadmap for delivering cultural and creative uses in high streets and in prioritising actions and interventions.

Why now?

It is now widely accepted that the dominant model of the high street is in decline, and that the Covid-19 pandemic has helped accelerate a number of trends already seen across the country. In response, policy-makers have introduced a number of schemes (e.g. Town Funds, Future High Street Fund, Heritage High Street Fund, and recently Levelling Up Fund) with ambitions to 'renew and reshape town centres and

high streets'. This aspiration to re-imagine is a step in the right direction and, in the South East, a number of local authorities and cultural and creative sector stakeholders are working at local level to reinvent the function of high streets and rejuvenate their offer and economies. There is a lot to learn from these processes, and a lot to be shared. With high streets and town centres being on the agenda at national level and the different funding opportunities, SELEP is ideally placed to bring together knowledge and capacity, and deliver leadership for high street rejuvenation through creative and cultural initiatives which will drive recovery, long-term growth and resilience in the South East.

The region's high streets and the creative sector are both emerging from the pandemic with great challenges to tackle, and with great uncertainties. But there are also clear opportunities to be bold and imaginative when thinking and planning for the future. For example, new patterns of living and working could over time bolster new types of enterprise, as well as a more inclusive, localised economy and community-led regeneration efforts. This changing context could point to the revival of local high streets, alongside traditional focal points, and there is huge potential for the creative sector to contribute to a re-imagined model for those.

Of course, high streets in the South East are extremely diverse. They are also complex in their nature and in the challenges they face, which means there is no easy fix. However, by developing an understanding of the current and emerging structural and more localised challenges that the region's high streets face, and by learning from exemplar adaptive and creative responses, there is a clear opportunity for their evolution to be shaped and steered towards shared and common positive outcomes that will benefit the whole region and its growing creative ecosystems.

Getting involved

Best practices & exemplar initiatives

The development of the narrative will be informed and supported by case study research which will be undertaken in a selected number of SELEP high streets over the coming months. Learnings from these case studies will be brought together to help prepare a reference framework to enable the development of bespoke creative and adaptive responses for SELEP high streets. The case studies will consider how best to address challenges, implement actions and record success as well as gather useful learnings on delivery expertise, viability and impacts.

In this context, we are looking to identify high street-based regeneration projects and initiatives in which the cultural and creative sectors are playing a key role (either as enabler or as recipient). We are particularly interested in initiatives and projects that seek to address the region's broader challenges and strategic priorities, such as:

- Responding to new technology, changing work and consumption patterns;
- Supporting creation, collaboration and entrepreneurship;
- Providing for flexibility and experimentation;
- Boosting local economies and tourism as well as enhancing local historic character;
- Improving skills, educational opportunities and participation;
- Creating a distinctive sense of place;
- Supporting quality of life and healthy living;
- Driving or participating in the zero carbon agenda.

→ Are you aware or involved in an exemplar high street-based initiative or project in the South East region where the creative and cultural sector is driving positive and radical change? Please tell us about it!

Email Lili Laine at lili@wemadethat.co.uk

Learning more, & sharing your thoughts

We are still in the early stages of the commission and are willing to hear thoughts and insights from SELEP's partners and stakeholders which will inform the project process and case building development.

We will run two introductory virtual sessions which will be an opportunity for the project team to run through the scope of the commission and its opportunities, as well as discuss:

- The South East USP and what this means for its high streets and cultural and creative sector;
- High street context(s) in the SELEP region: key challenges and the role the cultural and creative sector can play;
- How to measure success, build collective buy-in and joined up action across the region.

- To sign up to one of the virtual sessions please follow these links:
- **Thursday 24th of June 12-1pm** – <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/159169242489>
 - **Thursday 29th of June 4-5pm** – <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/159171376873>

NOTE

The team will carefully select the case studies so that they are representative of the region's different geographies and can speak to a range of high street contexts. In this way, we cannot guarantee that all the high streets and projects suggested by stakeholders will be selected as 'in-depth' case studies. However, all information received will inform the narrative development and be referred to in the report. The team will put together a 'Creative High Streets' map which will identify and showcase past and ongoing initiatives for embedding creative and cultural uses in high streets. This is expected to be a useful resource for SELEP's partners and stakeholders.

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