



Above: opening panel discussion at the BFI - with, from left, Caroline Robbie of BDP, Sharon Ament of the Museum of London, Heather Fearfield of Future Cities Forum, Ken Dytor of Urban Catalyst, and Robert Laycock of Marlow Film Studios

FUTURE CITIES FORUM

REPORT

Creative Cities - at the British Film Institute

March 2023

Introduction

In January 2023, the House of Lords' Communications and Digital Committee published its report 'At risk: our creative future'. Its main findings were as follows: it warns that Government complacency risks undermining the UK's creative industries in the face of increased international competition and rapid technological change. The Committee said that the UK's creative industries should sit at the heart of the UK's economic growth plans but sounded the alarm over missed opportunities and a failure among senior Government figures to recognise the sector's commercial potential.

It stated that the UK's creative industries were worth more than £115 billion to the UK economy before the pandemic, and make up as many as one in eight businesses across the country – in 2019 worth more than the aerospace, life sciences and automotive industries combined.

The report acknowledges the Government's ongoing work but says urgent action is needed to ensure the UK does not fall behind fast-moving international competitors. Key recommendations include improve tax policy to boost innovation, protect the UK's intellectual property framework, ensure there is a cross-Government focus on skills shortages in the creative industries, and UK Research and Innovation should identify options to continue the most successful parts of the Creative Clusters Programme after March 2023.

At Future Cities Forum on 22nd March in the screening rooms at the British Film Institute, the discussions tackled these issues, with leading figures from the museums, film, local government and built environment sectors. Questions were asked around investment, education and skills training, connected housing and jobs as well as best practice in museum and film studio design and master planning.

Read on to find out (among other guests) what Sharon Ament, Director of the Museum of London, Robert Laycock, CEO of Marlow Film Studios and Partner of the Ian Fleming Estate, and Ken Dytors, Chair of Urban Catalyst – which is working on regeneration developments at Purfleet by the Thames Estuary next to the Royal Opera House's production campus, had to say on the growth of the creative industries – and our conclusions at the end of the report.

Panel 1: The growth of creative cities

Our first panel discussion looked at the trends for investment in museums, connected jobs and housing in creative districts as well as new film campus design. Sharon Ament and Robert Laycock were on our first discussion panel with the Chair of developer Urban Catalyst, Ken Dytor and BDP Principal and co-head of the media environments team in North America, Caroline Robbie.

Sharon is overseeing the move of the Museum of London to its new site in Smithfield in the City of London - due to open in 2025/6 - with new ideas on museum curation and audience attraction.

Many museums are recording that they are not up to full visitor numbers yet post pandemic and are weighing up the value of putting on new exhibitions with balancing their finances. Sharon is keen to create a day to night economy at the museum where people can visit the 'temperance cocoa rooms' for a coffee, the cafe acting as a community facility drawing in the surrounding population as well as visitors to London.

It is an initiative that has worked very well in Norway with restaurants and bars now open much later into the evening at the new Munch Museum, to catch the passer-by in the dock-side Bjorvika district.

How museums attract new audiences and work in a connected way for larger visitor or tourism economies is being supported by the DCMS. Last November, it announced a major £2.25 million boost - 'NewcastleGateshead Initiative' - working in partnership with Visit Northumberland and Visit County Durham, to develop new attractions, build on local heritage and cultural assets and maximise the potential of the region's natural assets. The aim has been to attract more investment, welcome sporting, business and cultural events, support business growth, and create new jobs.

Sharon says she is experiencing a full range of emotions from 'hysteria to euphoria' when she considers the continuing task ahead of her with the museum move, and she never thought at some stage in her career that she would be in charge of a half-billion-pound real estate project. She reflected on the 'contorted' site of the current museum on London Wall compared to the new location in the market halls at Smithfield:



Above: original 'fortress' roundabout site of the Museum of London in the City of London

'When it opened there was a Guardian newspaper article suggesting that the Queen could open the museum if she could find it! The architects had failed to get the full site for the museum in the 1970's and from the 'get go' we were impenetrable, being in the middle of a busy roundabout. There were no bridges across.

'The city surveyors approached me offering a new site at Smithfield to give me a new front door. We started out planning this move, thinking about how visitors can get into us and then considering the full re-imagination of what we will become. You must be more creative when dealing with old buildings that had a different purpose than when working with new ones. What do you do with an (underground) train line running through the site? How do you work with Victorian beams, how do you inhabit the spaces? So, we went back into our DNA of over seven million objects and our standard for community engagement with children's voices, collecting the common person and understanding London. We have fifty museum curators but also ten million people out there who are also our 'curators'. We cover thirty-three boroughs for our audience and connect across the world too. It is a museum of the street, and we are working to bring that street inside. We want to be 24 hours and that means deep time, night time, real time - even 'tea time'. We are going to sit in the middle of a neighbourhood and on the Elizabeth Line and we must make the best of it, but we are also - I say - only two stops from Paris.'



Above: view from Holborn Viaduct looking north with Museum of London construction site on right and the Farringdon above station development

Sharon was asked whether there is any sense of guilt in still celebrating London, when there is so much of a new focus by central government and politicians on levelling up the North and Midlands?

'I lived in Liverpool for most of my early life, but no I don't think we should feel guilty about celebrating London. I see people flowing in and out of London to live and do creative projects. There is culture going out from London. We do really need to re-frame our arguments. London has some of the poorest boroughs in the country, and London itself needs to level up. My job is to show, despite living in dense conditions, how millions of people have lived and rubbed along together over the last 2,000 years and long may it continue. I think the levelling up argument is despicable, and I won't put up with any divisive rhetoric between London and the rest of the UK.



Above: CGI from Stanton Williams of entrance to the London Museum (Museum of London) at West Smithfield, created out the historic market buildings – with the 'Cocoa Rooms' Cafe, and close to Farringdon station

Pockets of deprivation also exist along the Thames Estuary and Future Cities Forum invited Ken Dytor, Founder and Executive Chairman of Urban Catalyst, to comment how what is needed in terms of investment, jobs and connected housing. Ken has been developing private and affordable social housing in Purfleet.

Ken said:

'When you walk into a room like this at the BFI, your level of excitement just goes through the roof and that is what culture can do for creative districts and the economy of the country. When I was ten years-old I wrote to the 'Ministry of Castles' and asked for a job. They said I was too young but as an adult I became a member of the English Heritage committee, because culture and the creative industries are a powerful force.

'I think we need to understand UK PLC - it is revered from all over the world. I started going to China about 15 years ago and they wanted to pull down their industrial buildings and it had to made clear that pulling them down meant stopping growth. Now they ask me how can you help us with this heritage knowledge. Along the Thames Estuary there is a rich cultural mix and London at one end of it is phenomenal. It is a great staging post. In the Thames Estuary there are two bodies - the 'production corridor' driven by the GLA and then the creative estuary and I was talking last night to Kate Willard OBE, who is Chair of the Growth Board and Government appointed Thames Estuary Envoy, about the poverty along the Thames Estuary and what we can do about it.

'Connected jobs and housing is very important. I am a trustee of the High House Production Park, based near Purfleet, where there is a training school and you can learn about backstage crafts, which is very important as each theatre in London has a different setting to maintain. When we started thinking of building homes in the area, we called a meeting of local people and they asked, what is

this new settlement going to do for us? They wanted local employment. So, we have been working with South Essex College on training schemes and these are for local people, while building affordable housing in Purfleet. We have put in an integrated medical centre and other facilities such as a school, but we meet every month to consult with local people and we do change the scheme according to what they say. When we started our planning application a couple of years ago on the development, we invited the Chair of the local community to speak and that made all the difference.'



Above: The 'Hub' at Marlow Film Studios (CGI from Wilkinson Eyre)

Investment interest in new film and production studios is continuing strongly in the UK. The forthcoming Media Bill is planning to ensure that public service content is prominent, available, and easily accessible across a range of platforms, can update the public broadcast framework for the digital age and promote the production and distribution of distinctively British content. So, our panel discussion continued with the issues around providing enough studio space for production to take place in the UK, providing high-quality content and ensuring that young people are receiving the right kind of skills training to take up jobs within the industry.

Planning for a new UK centre for high-end film and TV production has been submitted by a group of local entrepreneurs and arts industry professionals in Buckinghamshire at the former gravel pits near the town of Marlow. The team behind the property company has delivered between them projects such as the London Olympics, King's Cross and CB1 Cambridge.

Buckinghamshire has a long association with Oscar winning films and creative industries and is home to Pinewood Studios and the National Film and Television School. Robert Laycock, Co-founder of Dido Property Ltd and his team want to leverage the future studios' place in this local cluster, providing new jobs, skills, education, training and apprenticeships in a growth industry, which they say has the potential to provide wealth and prosperity for future generations. They add that the aim of the project is to enhance the ecological and transport infrastructure of the area, while bringing cultural and recreational benefits to the community. Engagement has been designed around an exhibition, feedback forms, online community meetings and newsletters.



Above: part of the proposed Marlow Film Studios campus (Wilkinson Eyre)

The master plan is intended to provide versatile production facilities flexible to the diverse needs of the TV and film industry. There will be four independent clusters of studios and offices with sufficient capacity to cater for multiple concurrent productions, integrated into the existing landscape through a connected green network that brings additional nature to the site. The team says there will also be a recreational outdoor space of high ecological value together with a Culture and Skills Academy space and a main square with amenities, such as a cafe, for occupiers. The Studio Hub will be a primary point of focus for the site with screening rooms, exhibition space, cafes, restaurants with a Public Right of Way next to it and through the development.

Robert stated in the panel discussion that 4,000 jobs will be created if the campus goes ahead:

'We are looking at half a billion dollars inwards investment. This is an enormous area that has been scarred by gravel workings and the project is providing skills training and opportunities for young people who want to get into the film industry but simply don't know how.

'I would say that it is great that £18 billion has been spent on the Elizabeth Line but I am afraid Marlow in transport terms is still in the 1920s. So, we are putting on a public bus to help bring crew in and out of the site. Film making only happened accidentally in California and the truth is that we have the leadership and culture in the UK to carry out this industry. The crews that are needed are tightly clustered around Buckinghamshire, they are invisible, but they are there. They have to travel on top of very long days and so we have to think about them, how they get to the film studios, their accommodation and facilities when they are there. There is a reason that Tom Cruise has been filming Million Impossible in a muddy field in Longcross and that's because it's where the crews are. Bucks really understands the film industry and it knows it can have its own version of Silicon Valley.

'However, it is a 'fortress' IP-driven business, and it has to be more open. There is no lack of desire from kids to get into the film business, but they need on-set training with a producer. We need to break down barriers to steward them into roles.

'Only 50% of the world has the internet but when the rest of the world gets connected, there will be a voracious consuming of content and that won't go away. Yes, there will be bumps in the road but we are good at ideas and story-telling in the UK and the Chancellor is right when he says we have to go further than we are already.'

Ellie Evans, Partner at Volterra - an economics advisory business - has been working with Robert and spoke from the audience:

'The truth is if we don't build the Marlow Films Studio here, it won't show up magically in the North and this links to the levelling up debate. We will simply be losing economic value. Of course, there is not enough of a workforce yet, but we are making pathways available to people. We must take hold and commit otherwise we will lose tax revenues that could be re-cycled into other things. I was at a meeting yesterday in the City of London where it became clear that no one spends money in Leadenhall Market. Now there are plans for a massive event space and garden there to encourage families not just employees to go there and enjoy it. This is a really good example of what the creative industries can do.'

Caroline Robbie, Head of Media Environments in Toronto at architect firm, BDP, also joined our first panel at our creative industries and cities forum. Caroline says she aims to achieve solutions to design challenges approaching her work through a perspective that is grounded in art.

She has led teams on a number of design-forward and award-winning projects including the Deluxe studios in Toronto, Los Angeles and New York, Artscape Daniels Launchpad, OCAD U CO along with the Corus Entertainment workplace, 60 Atlantic Avenue and its sister site, 80 Atlantic in Liberty Village and BDP Toronto's own studio. Her role as a thought-leader in the industry and in the workplace is strengthened by conceptual design installations at major exhibitions and industry events.

Caroline is a former director and board member for Ontario and Canada's professional associations for interior design as well as serving on the board of the Toronto Arts Foundation and the Advisory Board for Creative Cities International based in New York City. She has over 40 years' experience in the industry internationally as a former director of Alsop Architects Ltd.

BDP is working on the Downsview project near Toronto and Urban Toronto describes the project:

'In its entirety, the Hangar District is a 102-acre site, originally referred to in the planning documents for id8 as Taxiway West, that occupies the southwestern arm of the larger Downsview Airfield lands. The site has a long history of industrial uses over the last century and is deeply connected to innovations in the field of aviation in both the pre-war and post-war periods, as the manufacturing centre for aircraft companies such as Bombardier. The lands are currently occupied by several industrial structures including 12 hangar buildings, and a handful of associated buildings surrounding the hangars to the south, as well as extensive surface parking. All of these existing structures maintain a low-to-mid-rise massing.'

Caroline Robbie commented on the project in the discussion:

'I am a Canadian and I work in Canada and this is one of our projects at BDP. We are turning an old defence air field into a new production facility. It is where the De Havilland aircraft were built and we want to create something new here not pull down the buildings, giving them a new lease of life. Tech is pushing everything forward and there are volumes that have a lot of stuff around them - we are dealing with real background and not green screens. The film industry really is moving very fast.'

She continued to talk on the strength of the UK film industry:

'You guys really need to know the UK product is the best in the world for film and all the work and talent about CGI and gaming design. There is a strong history, and it is an industry that is trying to create sustainability. The UK is always the pioneer and creating something around social values.'



Above: Downsview Studios Campus, Toronto, Canada (BDP)

Caroline concluded her part in the discussion by setting out the important features in allowing film cities to grow:

'Film companies care about tax breaks and that the talent is there for the crews, so we build facilities quickly. We shouldn't try and control a private industry. That's how Toronto grew quickly and then gaming as we have very good animators coming out of our universities. There are concerned

conversations about facial capture, but I would say don't put breaks on these industries. I try to align with my clients' perspectives and produce buildings that can be open on time to meet production deadlines. I want to be part of the solution. The entertainment industry is growing for what people want and we need to provide the training skills to meet demand.'

Sharon Ament rounded up the first panel discussion by saying that we really need to remind ourselves that there is the digital and analogue world and people want to be in (physical) places:

'Social places as well as digital are important. We have a democratic street scape providing important inter-connection. Content is everything. We have all been to a wonderful museum where there is no content. I think we have to have that awareness of what good quality content is and strive for it.'



Above: aerial view CGI of the Museum of London development site at West Smithfield (Stanton Williams)

Panel 2: The power of film studios to boost the UK economy



Future Cities Forum's second panel discussion at our 'Creative Cities' event held at the BFI, looked at the growth of investment in film studios to boost the UK economy.

Taking part (pictured above - from left) were Barry Jobling, Director, Hoare Lea, Andrew Osborne, Head of Economic Growth at Ashford Borough Council, Owen Spencer, Senior Associate at Forsters LLP, Jason Lebidineuse, Director at architects Scott Brownrigg, and Michael P. Davies, Founder and Director, Vitamin Advisers.

Jason spoke of Scott Brownrigg's work at Shinfield Studios, on a site in Berkshire owned by Reading University, which is a third of the way through construction:

'Netflix and Disney are already filming there and it is on the original science park. Longcross - an old defence site in Surrey - is also a good example of how some sites are more suitable for filming and it is where we were appointed to carry out the master-planning. In a joint venture with Countryside and Aviva Investors, we looked at changing the site into a business park but it never really had the necessary legs. You really need an anchor tenant, a university and public money from the council. Longcross didn't quite have that but we have been active in the film industry for many years and it seemed natural to go about re-purposing those sheds into new film studios. It is no surprise that Tom Cruise chose the location for filming.'



Above: Shinfield studios in Berkshire (designed Scott Brownrigg - photo courtesy of Earth Grid & Curo)

Jason continued:

'The key thing that Shinfield had was the university involvement, linking it to the community. They don't like being described as Reading as they are in the Borough of Wokingham. There is a lot of work that goes into taking the local community and council with you along the journey of creating these studios. Will the roads around the site be gridlocked during the school and work-life rush hour for example? But because of the long working hours of the film crews, this wasn't going to be a problem. Then there are questions about how many productions will take place there? How many studios are needed - three or four? What is the sizing of the production office required? Once you understand the needs, you can go from there.'

'There is a speed to market challenge in the film business, it is the craziest of sectors. So the masterplan has to be flexible and we are constantly re-designing, and using temporary buildings on different areas of the site in the form of kits of parts. This also helps with the life cycle costing. There is a challenge in how these buildings can be given a better life cycle and the insurance is huge. But they are far more sustainable with reduction in the use of concrete and so they can last up to 60 years.



Above: Barry Jobling of Hoare Lea (courtesy Hoare Lea)

Barry Jobling joined the panel to talk about his experience at consulting engineers Hoare Lea in delivering high quality acoustic environments for the film industry. Hoare Lea is working on Sky Studios' Elstree project in Hertfordshire, where Sky is creating a 32-acre TV and film studio that will allow more high quality, original content to be created. The new development will sit beside the current studios and is a significant investment into the creative economy. It is forecasted to create up to 2,000 jobs in the local area. The project's team includes NBCUniversal and Comcast, Hertsmere Borough Council and Legal & General.

In addition to the Elstree project, Hoare Lea's work in the UK film studios sector includes Warner Bros Leavesden Studios (completed) Space Studios in Manchester (completed), Eastbrook Studios Dagenham (under construction), Shinfield Studios near Reading and Pinewood Screen Hub in Buckinghamshire (both at planning application stages).

Barry stated:

'Hoare Lea is multi-disciplinary and the acoustics team has been fortunate to get into the film industry over the last ten years. The challenge in part comes from the film industry being very good at making do. Working in the sector requires a lot of work and learning around what the film studios need and what we can actually provide.

'The studios need to be quiet to capture the best in sound quality and there are many ways to crack an egg in doing this. Instead of using ten inches of concrete for sound proof walls, perhaps we can suggest alternative materials to the client. When we worked for Warner Brothers, there was the same need for speed that there is now and it was a case of maxing out the budget. We were forced to innovate and create lighter quicker builds with less carbon. Mainly we are working with industrial buildings and how they can be enhanced. It is an education.

Barry commented on the building of the new film studios adjacent the heritage railway works in Ashford in Kent which he has visited and consulted on:

'It's a challenge accepted, where you have to be mindful of the money equation. You are building intelligent boxes with a limited budget, so you really get your thinking caps on, but can all be done.'



Above: CGI of new film studios at Ashford NTW to be built on a brownfield site around heritage railway works - Courtesy Ashford Borough Council.

Ashford Borough Council's Head of Economic Growth, Andrew Osborne, shared the panel with Barry and spoke of the enormous task in hand to deliver the new film studios for Kent:

'We are creating the new studios at the Victorian railway works site in Ashford which was in operation since 1847 and has been producing locomotives over the years. The site has been derelict for 35 years but there is significant heritage. We are not putting studios in those buildings but creating a mixed-use development with commercial space, and then studios in separate buildings. We have planning permission for all of it and the site is some 80,000 square feet.'

Andrew was asked how the site would be branded to attract business in competition with other studios in the UK?

'The concentration of film studios in west London is the driver for UK PLC and the UK does need a range of spaces to support talent. We are bringing talent through in smaller spaces in Kent. Our location is excellent, and we could have people commuting to use the studios from Calais in France as they can easily travel through the Channel tunnel, but we are also close to London and Paris via the fast train links. We are five minutes' walk from the train station at Ashford and we are working on the place-making of the site, celebrating the heritage of the town and bringing these new industries. We want to bring in skills and training and want to link for that with the University of Canterbury. We are working with the Kent Film Office and the recent Sam Mendes film 'Empire of Light' that filmed in Margate, creates tourism and attention for us too. We have our levelling up funding and working with studio operators. It is hugely challenging because of the brownfield site that we are on, but we are making space where talent wants to be.'



Above: CGI of Ashford NTW ('New Town Works') and studios campus with heritage buildings on right (Ashford Borough Council / Quinn Estates)

What of the legal considerations in moving forward with the building of film studios in the UK? Owen Spencer, Senior Associate at leading law firm, Forsters LLP, joined the panel to answer the question. Owen acts for Netflix and Columbia Pictures in relation to their occupational requirements. He also acts for investor landlords, including in relation to acquiring sites to construct new studios.

Owen said:

'Why would stars such as Tom Cruise want to choose Longcross because it is not a glamorous place that you would normally associate with the film industry? The answer is because it works, and it therefore is not a risk but a guarantee. The place is more like a tank factory, and you can knock it about, so there isn't always a drawback to working in an old building, which is tried and tested.'

'What are the legal warning flags? It depends on what you are developing, whether on brownfield or greenfield sites, there will always be different challenges around planning. It makes sense to understand the implications before spending any money and be accurate about what it is you are converting. Mostly for the film business it is not about historic buildings but light industrial sheds which are being converted into small studios, so you are not thinking about how to deal with asbestos or Victorian beams, but there can be issues around parking or energy power sources in addition to noise. Something can look good on paper, but the reality of the site can be quite different.'



CGI by MICA Architects of proposed cultural development in Ashford town centre (part of the St Mary's and Vicarage Lane regeneration project for developer Milligan in association with Ashford Council)

Founder of new advisory firm Vitamin Advisers, Michael P. Davis, talked on the panel about how the trend for producers and crews is now for 'out of London':

'I set up the film studio business at JLL over ten years ago and worked with Ealing film studios among others, where I had an advisory position. I assess the viability of new places and funding and also work on cultural destinations.

'Culture is providing a catalyst for economic viability. London has always been a powerhouse but where successful studios are built, it is always underpinned by the council. Games of Thrones was going to be filmed in Scotland but there was a better supportive offer in Belfast, so it went there. Dr Who filmed in Wales allowed a whole host of people there who were out of work to engage. Production numbers are vast and absorb some 400 to 800 people that make up the crew on one production. If you look at the latest British Film Institute figures, we will need a further 25,000 people to move into the industry.'

Michael was asked about the reluctance of crews to move outside London to work:

'I know plenty of crew members who would love to leave London and go back to Wales for example. We are talking about the impact of lifestyle. A few years ago, everyone would have laughed about successful film productions in Cornwall but executive producers love to go down there. There are Hollywood producers who want to bring filming back to Sunderland because they grew up there and see it as an economic catalyst for the North.

'With successful film production comes gentrification of areas and that is always difficult to talk about. It has happened in Margate, but nevertheless there is always a trade-off. It enables the visibility of other things. The 'Empire of Light' filming in Margate has been the best branding for Kent and Ashford. Years ago, crews would not go down to Ashford but now they would.'



Above: Bob and Tamar Manoukian Production Workshop for the Royal Opera House at High House Production Park in Thames Estuary is one of several training establishment along with the University of Kent and local colleges that are being created to fill the skills gap for the creative industries.

Panel 3: Building creative districts, artist studios and education skills training



Above: panel discussion on skills and support for the creative sector at the BFI with (from left) Gavin Poole of Here East, Fred Pilbrow of Pilbrow & Partners, Jennifer Daothong of Lewisham Council, Heather Fearfield of Future Cities Forum, Paul de Carvalho of 3 Mills Studios, and Adam Calvin of VERB (for HOP Bedfordshire - on screen)

Future Cities Forum's third panel discussion at the BFI gave a focus to the need for building more creative districts in the UK while attending to skills training for the film industry and supporting artists.

Lewisham Council's Acting Chief Executive, Jennifer Daothong, spoke of the emerging artists' scene away from west London, eastwards:

'I guess there is now a history of artists moving eastwards. I have been here about 18 months and it is incredibly important to help provide space for creatives to boost the London economy. Where new groups of artists arrive, new creative ideas flourish and we need the big partners to invest and commit to that. Mid-century the Windrush families arrived in Lewisham and it is those communities who should benefit. We need to provide platforms for others to succeed and the Mayor of London has done much in that area. Artists are incredibly good at getting the word out and it has helped that Lewisham and Deptford have become London's first Creative Enterprise Zone. But we have to

cultivate it. Expanding participation across the arts can be difficult - it can seem like a closed shop to some. Despotic regimes always close down artistic expression and there has been a history of radicalism in Lewisham. We must provide opportunities for cultural expression that are representative of those living in the borough and with language that resonates with them.'



Above: Here East campus on the Olympic park, Stratford (courtesy of UCL / the Bartlett)

Could the developments at Here East be accused of adopting outside investment and companies that do not resonate with local communities? Here East CEO, Gavin Poole, responded:

'No, I don't think so. It has taken a lot of work over the last eleven years and courage from the owners and investors to listen to us at Here East when we have declined (potential occupier) offers because it doesn't fit in with the vision of the community or the educational future that we want for the site. If we deviate from our vision, we are off message and we need to continually commit to that. That is where we drive the value from my shareholders and providing what we think is appropriate. We are about regeneration for social change - social change using buildings. Our biggest cohort of students are the newer diverse. Yes, we have the Bartlett (School of Architecture) here, but we are also providing courses in music and dance, esports and animation, apprenticeships not just degrees and for young people who may be the first in their families to go to university. Teesside University is opening up this year with courses in AI, the Metaverse and the virtual world.

'We wanted to include the existing communities in the place from the start bringing F&B and retail in and opening well before the site started to emerge and supporting the community by creating democratic streets. Everything we do is only with the permission of the community and the boroughs. We have a lot of community engagement. We have insight days when five hundred kids come in to see what opportunities there are.'



Above: CGI of remodelled and restored EMD Granada Cinema in Walthamstow (Pilbrow & Partners for Soho Theatre Group)

Fred Pilbrow, Founding Partner of architects Pilbrow & Partners joined the panel to talk about working on cultural districts with local authorities and developing film studios at Here East:

'Walthamstow Council has responded to my and Soho Theatre's case to save the old theatre in the town which is now going to be a national centre for comedy but other experiences such as with Tileyard in Islington have been more difficult. When we talked to the council about bringing in four hundred music businesses, they just wanted light industrial concerns. They were not keen on culture and sometimes you wonder whether the planning system is fit for purpose.'

'At Here East in east London you can see a unique creative pulse and dynamism and where a major sound stage offer that we are working on might be good. We have a great team including Stufish working on it and we are looking at how to re-construct existing buildings in a cost effective manner. We are researching the existing facilities and developing a prototype of a new sound stage with the need for privacy, but also a sense of place where crews can relax and enjoy working.'



Above: Aerial shot of 3 Mills Studios in east London (from 3 Mills Studios - picture credit - John Fielding)

Do producers and film crews prefer working in heritage sites because of the attractive environment provided by old buildings or newer builds - a question put to Paul de Carvalho, the General Manager of 3 Mills Studios in east London?

'We are a former gin distillery dating back to 1775 and the feedback that we get is that people like working on the creative island out here, walking down the cobbles and knowing that this place has a long history. Crews mostly come from east London to work here and it has been positively hired to about 95% of capacity over the last 12 years, since I have been managing it. Most of the crews live in the area and stock motion films are carried out there.

'It is a 250-year-old site so difficult to make sustainable and there is a lot to improve. Unfortunately, power operating is done through generators. All our clients want to know what we are doing about sustainability, so we are keen to work on that.

'It is all about creating a sense of place at the end of the day. Twickenham has the slogan 'home for film makers' and people love being there. Ealing is an exciting creative hub. Ultimately, we have to build creative places that attract people and where people want to make content.'



Above: CGI of proposed Home of Production (HOP) film studios campus in Bedfordshire (Scott Brownrigg)

VERB's Development Solutions Director, Adam Calvin, contributed to the panel discussion about creating a real sense of place where film crews can relax on film production sites:

'There is a lot of movement in the real estate space around film at the moment and it is a hot sector to be working in. We have been working at HOP in Bedfordshire and there are certain factors that we are trying to push the boundaries with to create better spaces. If you look at Pinewood it is extremely successful, but it is inefficient, the power goes down and that means that hours in the day are lost, and it is felt by individual crew members. They have to eat their lunch sometimes in the car because the cafes are closed. Crews are more mercenary these days and will leave the production mid shoot if they are given a better offer elsewhere. So, we need to provide a high-quality home for them and look after their needs.

'We are building temporary accommodation and new homes in the area which also relate to existing studios down the road. We have a responsibility to the crews to make these studios feel like proper places, where they can feel like they have a life, providing food trucks, plazas to sit in and a creche. We also want to leave half the site fallow for ecology, although it loses revenue for us. We are designing the site with gaps between the buildings, to allow for the plazas and ultimately a place the crews want to be, so projects can be delivered.'

Jennifer Daothong answered a question about how possible it was to pull the magic out of film studios for creative experiences in towns:

'We have world class facilities in Lewisham and open performance taking place in Deptford through Trinity Laban which includes dance for older people. We forget about the soft power of culture for all the community and how it knits it together. I recently heard a comment that we didn't have a proper

university in the borough, unless it taught engineering, but I think that misses the point about the power of culture and science to come together to fill in the gaps. There is perhaps more work to do in creating public realm and wayfinding that knits our cultural hotspots together, but when Convoys Wharf for example comes together, people will be able to walk from the borough's waterfront to (look at and connect to) Canary Wharf which is very exciting.

Below: CGI of proposed sound stage / film studio space at Here East (Pilbrow & Partners)



Conclusions

There is an urgent need to recognise the potential of the UK creative industries and this has been stated in The House of Lords' January 2023 report, 'At risk: our creative future.' The UK must work fast in the face of international competition, for instance, in improving tax policy to boost innovation.

Museums are often at the centre of growing creative districts and are understanding their role in exploring a more sustainable day-to-night economy in their towns and cities.

There is increasing provision to close the skills gap for the expanding film industry. Thousands of technical roles are becoming available for film crews and those working in post-production. Flexible master plans for film campuses should be built for longevity and those working there must be supported with high-quality facilities.

Artists should be encouraged to stay within creative districts with affordably priced studios, and cultural provision should be appropriately curated for communities and speak to their particular 'language'.

Read more of our conclusions here:

- The Museum of London is hoping to be more accessible to visitors than in its previous location and intends to make the most of its transport connections on the Elizabeth Line, Thames Link, to the North and to Paris (and wider Europe). Director Sharon Ament commented that she thinks the levelling up argument is 'despicable' and that she won't be part of a divisive rhetoric between London and the rest of the UK.
- She also warned that there should be a balance of interest between both analogue and digital worlds, as people still wanted to be present in well designed and democratic streetscapes. Everyone should aim for high quality content whether in a museum or in film production.
- The DCMS is currently spending £2.25 million on a new tourism initiative in Newcastle and surrounding region, promoting culture, natural features of the landscape and sports activities available.
- Urban Catalyst developer Ken Dytor highlighted that UK PLC is revered around the world and it should be capitalised on. It is important also to note that local communities want affordable housing provision around employment and training, and to have a real say in how their creative communities are designed.

- The BFI's latest figures suggest that 25,000 people are needed to work in the growing film industry. More production facilities are needed for filming as consumer demand grows for series such as The Crown and Game of Thrones. However there are ongoing questions about where film campuses should be sited and whether the green belt a good location?
- Robert Laycock, who is partner in the Ian Fleming Estate and pursuing planning permission for Marlow Film Studios in Buckinghamshire, says film campus expansion is right as we have the culture and leadership in the UK for film making. He suggests that the UK's talents ideas and storytelling are exceptionally strong, but that the crews must be looked after with proper facilities and accommodation on film campus sites. His economics adviser, Ellie Evans of Volterra, says if planning permission isn't granted for Marlow Film Studios, it won't show up in the North of England, and there will be a loss of economic value and tax revenues.
- BDP spoke of the value of re-purposing war time era defence buildings as with its project in Canada at Downs View. Principal and Co-head of the Media Environments Team, BDP North America, Caroline Robbie, said that the UK was particularly good at tackling sustainability in film campus design and a pioneer of creating associated social value. She stated that film studio projects must be delivered on time for clients, as the industry is moving very fast now.
- Scott Brownrigg described how most successful film production campuses require an anchor tenant, a university or college and public money from the council, while attention must be paid to fair road use between the site and the community. Flexible master plans with temporary buildings to extend the life cycle cost are a must.
- Hoare Lea has experienced, especially the acoustics area, the need for lighter, quicker builds with less carbon.
- Ashford Borough Council has been using levelling up money to convert historic railway buildings into a mixed-use and modern film studios campus in a site, well connected to London and France. 'Empire of Light' is the latest film to create interest in Margate and associated tourism and has a direct branding impact on the Ashford film studios project.
- Law firm Forsters LLP warned around potential planning issues in investing in light industrial buildings for film production. These issues can be around sound, parking and energy use. Risk has been seen to be reduced around older heritage buildings, that have been tried and tested.
- Vitamin Advisers suggested a trend for both producers and crews to re-locate out of London to places such as Cornwall and Wales where new film production is taking place, to achieve a better lifestyle balance. Any trade-off from gentrification – often seen in a bad light - can nevertheless be beneficial to the local economy.

- The importance of providing more artists' studios in south and east London cannot be underestimated for the growth of creative districts and the economy. Culture should not be imposed on communities and opportunities should be representative of the make up of local people and in a way that speaks their own language. More funding for wayfinding between cultural hotspots in the London Borough of Lewisham could be helpful in the future. Lewisham Council also stated that it was important to recognise the borough's river frontage and the soon to be enjoyed ability to connect to Canary Wharf through Convoys Wharf. The soft power of culture should not be overlooked in helping the health and fitness of older people (EG Trinity Laban).
- Here East is expanding to help students whose parents have not been to university and to provide a range of apprenticeships and degree courses in the creative arts. This involves subjects such as music and dance, esports, animation, AI etc. Here East's Chief Executive, Gavin Poole, said that the development of Here East is 'always with the community's permission' and that high quality place-making is a part of the vision.
- Architect Fred Pilbrow of Pilbrow & Partners is delighted with the way Waltham Forest Council has responded to the practice's restoration of Walthamstow's EMD Granada Cinema as a national centre for comedy – run by Soho Theatre Group. The firm is now working on potential new film studios for Here East and a new prototype of sound stage that provides essential privacy for those working in the industry.
- 3 Mills Studios in Bow, East London, enjoys the regular return of business clients in the film industry with its exceptional historic environment and its plans for sustainability. Manager Paul de Carvalho says it is important for all film production facilities to create a sense of place – like that achieved at Twickenham, branded 'the home for filmmakers.'
- VERB echoes others in suggesting that crews must be given high quality places to live and work and the developer is prepared to forfeit revenue to design beautiful plazas, places for the growth of ecology etc as it has done at HOP in Bedfordshire.

With many thanks to our contributors:

[The Museum of London \(The London Museum\)](#), [Urban Catalyst](#), [Marlow Film Studios](#), [BDP](#), [Hoare Lea](#), [Scott Brownrigg](#), [Ashford Borough Council](#), [Forsters LLP](#), [Vitamin Advisers](#), [Lewisham Council](#), [Here East](#), [Pilbrow & Partners](#), [3 Mills Studios / Knight Frank](#), [VERB \(HOP Bedfordshire\)](#), [Volterra Partners](#) – and the [British Film Institute](#)

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