

23 April 2012

Support for creative and digital industries in Walsall

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor A. Andrew - Regeneration

Report:

The creative and digital industries are identified as a key growth sector in Walsall's Local Economic Assessment. Nationally, the sector contributes the equivalent proportion of Gross Domestic Product as manufacturing, and it is estimated to grow by 4%, double that of the rest of the economy. There are also a number of spin-off benefits for other sectors of the economy – most notably through collaborative design ventures with manufacturers – as well as the sector's potential to assist delivery in a variety of interventions such as education and health and contribute to the vitality of town and district centres.

Walsall's Local Economic Assessment states that opportunities for the sector are linked to the large and diverse base in Birmingham, and are currently hindered by the lack of a critical mass of activity. It acknowledges that the sector is currently very small in Walsall, and under-represented in Walsall compared to the national average. It recommends attracting adequate, flexible, smaller incubation space; and providing business support to the design sub-sector, especially linking design services to manufacturers.

To build on these recommendations, an informal meeting with businesses in the creative and digital industries in Walsall took place in April. The purpose of the meeting was to understand the aspirations and barriers faced by the sector in Walsall, and collate feedback on a number of proposals based on best practice for supporting the sector around the country. Key findings of this meeting will be reported verbally to the panel.

An additional public meeting will take place on May 5th at The New Art Gallery Walsall with artists and local people with an interest in making Walsall a more creative place. It is hoped to respond to ideas from the meeting to help develop a more coherent voluntary arts infrastructure.

A facebook site has been created by the Communications team and is developing dialogue with local people about how to make Walsall a more creative place.

In addition to the above members of the Creative Development Team have been working in partnership with our Black Country partners to develop a bid to the Arts Council England for Creative People Creative Places Fund for £3million which if successful will bring £1million to Walsall over three years. This will develop arts

infrastructure, local arts projects development, festivals and events opportunities and capacity building across the spectrum of local creative industries form local groups, to profile opportunities to help develop the cultural offer from Walsall.


The draft Walsall Economic Strategy states that businesses will be encouraged to diversity into growth sectors and existing sectors will be supported. Under current proposals to remodel the existing Strategic Regeneration section to a Growth and Investment section, it is proposed to create a Sector Growth team. There is potential for this new team to lead on strategies to support the creative and digital industries sector in Walsall.

Recommendations:

That following the implementation of the remodelling of the existing Strategic Regeneration section, the Sector Growth manager (or equivalent, subject to the outcome of current consultation and cabinet approval) will present to the panel on options, based on existing best practice, feedback from the meeting with Walsall creative industries and other information.


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