

Kent and Essex creative industries ready to help kickstart the economy

With a vibrant community of more than 16,000 creative businesses, employing around 46,000 people, the Thames Estuary region has the potential to be one of the leading creative areas outside London.

That's the message of *Creative Estuary*, an ambitious three-year project to establish North Kent and South Essex as a growing hotbed of creative excellence all along the Estuary, from Margate to Southend.

Creative Estuary is part of the Government-backed Thames Estuary Production Corridor (TEPC) project and forms an important part of the overarching determination to transform the area with major investment in sectors such as transport, housing, education and the knowledge economy. The region's creative and cultural industries have also been identified for their potential, with long-term goals to create 50,000 new jobs and generate an extra £3.1 billion for the UK economy.

The reasons for this level of confidence are clear. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the creative sector – including music, theatre, the visual arts, computer and film – was the UK's fastest growing sector, annually bringing over £100 billion into the economy and supporting some 3 million jobs. Closer to home, the Estuary's 16,000 creative businesses employed around 46,000 people in a variety of fields, including: film, TV, radio, gaming, design, fashion, jewellery, marketing, PR, architecture, publishing museums, galleries, performing and visual arts.

"Our aim is to use culture as the catalyst for growth in this unique part of the country. The Thames Estuary can offer much-needed space for expanding creative businesses, and provide the scale of services, skills and infrastructure sought by both national organisations and international creative producers," says Sarah Dance, Chair of Creative Estuary.

She adds: *"Creative Estuary wants to attract inward investment by telling a new story about the Estuary and to empower creative individuals and firms to realise their potential."*

When the Government brought in the lockdown regulations back in March, *Creative Estuary* took the decision to reschedule this summer's much-anticipated *Estuary 2020* - a month-long curated programme of visual arts, literature, performance, film and discussions – but is delighted to announce that it will now take place in Spring 2021.

Through its Creative Assets Development project, *Creative Estuary* is also identifying currently underused or vacant buildings and spaces, with a view to redeveloping them for cultural and creative use. Pilot projects include the *Docking Station*, which is transforming the Grade 2 listed former Police Section House in Chatham's Historic Dockyard into a multi-use cultural and creative space.

Another *Creative Estuary* initiative is its exciting *Re:Generation 2031* scheme, which will provide mentoring, support, finance and training for young people, offering the region's next generation of creative leaders, direct access to aspirational projects and new opportunities.

An important aspect of the entire lockdown period was how the public responded to their dramatically changed circumstances. Millions turned to arts and creativity, both for entertainment and as a means to self-expression. As the UK's cultural institutions prepare to reopen their doors, *Creative Estuary* will also be an important conduit for people to gain access to excellent quality arts and culture, commissioning creative talent and new work for audiences and participants.

Albeit that it seeks to promote the abundance of talent and wealth of opportunities within a specific geographical area, *Creative Estuary* is also pursuing a policy of learning from and sharing with programmes across the UK and internationally. Similarly, its relationship with its Kent and Essex university partners will allow those individuals and

organisations engaging with *Creative Estuary* to draw on the research and latest developments, which will in turn further develop shared knowledge and drive commercialisation.

“Creative Estuary reflects our commitment as a Civic University to work in partnership with organisations in Kent and Medway and support activity which brings resources into the region, enables economic growth and contributes to long term sustainability and quality of life in Kent,” explains Professor Karen Cox, Vice-Chancellor and President University of Kent.

“I want Creative Estuary to be a catalyst for the creative and economic evolution of this unique region, helping to unlock its massive potential both as an international production hub and as a collaborative, inspirational working space for a new generation of creative talent.” says Emma Wilcox, Creative Estuary Director.

With a proud legacy of producing and being home to creativity, the countryside, towns and villages bordering the world-famous river are a glorious mix of juxtapositions; beautiful and gritty, peaceful and boisterous, rural and industrial. It is these contrasts that have drawn creative people to the region and sets it apart from other parts of the UK. Its proximity to London – in many cases little more than an hour away – and connectivity with the rest of the country and to Europe, will be key to the success of *Creative Estuary*.

For more information about Creative Estuary, visit www.creativeestuary.com, **Twitter** [@creativeestuary](https://twitter.com/creativeestuary) / **LinkedIn** [/creative-estuary](https://www.linkedin.com/company/creative-estuary/) / **Instagram** [@creativeestuary](https://www.instagram.com/creativeestuary)

NOTES FOR EDITORS

CREATIVE ESTUARY - Launched in 2019, with an ambition to transform 60 miles of the Thames Estuary across Essex and Kent into one of the most exciting cultural hubs in the world, the £6.5m Creative Estuary programme will transform the visibility, identity and future of the region’s creative production infrastructure, supporting more than 400 new jobs, delivering new skills, qualifications and apprenticeships for 300 people.

Stretching from Southend to Margate, the Thames Estuary is a region of untold creative potential. A network of fishing towns, heritage sites, imposing dockyards and post-industrial communities, it is home to some of the fastest growing regions in the UK and benefits from unprecedented levels of regeneration investment.

In early 2019 the University of Kent was awarded £4.3m from the DCMS Cultural Development Fund on behalf of the partners who include the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), Kent and Essex County Councils, the Greater London Authority, 11 local authority areas represented by Thames Gateway Kent Partnership and Opportunity South Essex, South East Creative Economy Network (SECEN), University of Essex, Locate in Kent and cultural organisations, Metal and Cement Fields.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, INTERVIEWS AND IMAGES

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