

## Hat District Cluster - Project Outline

13.06.17



**Fig 1: Luton Hat District. Hat Factory Arts Centre (top left); Hat House (Red-brick on right) and Hat Works (bottom left); Station top (green block) and University of Beds Art & Design School far left (light brown block).**

### 1. Background

Luton Culture Trust is an arts and cultural charity which supports and delivers much needed arts and cultural facilities and activities for our growing audience and customer-base. With a focus on heritage and place-making we are also keen to protect historic environment, buildings and sites. With a number of old hat factories being empty or falling into disrepair near to our Hat Factory Arts Centre, we wanted to safeguard these valuable assets and put them good use. Consequently, we have developed a project new which will transform two hat factories into creative workspace, refurbish part of the Hat Factory Arts Centre and develop more space for arts and culture in the Hat District area. Once complete, we will be able to provide specialist support and activity to bring creative and talented people together so that they can innovate, collaborate and celebrate creative success.

Learning from our important history of manufacturing hat making heritage, we will once again contribute to the local economy through creative industries by increasing job opportunities, visitors and spend to central. The development of three historic hat factories within the heritage context of the conservation area is important to the prosperity and sustainability of the cluster and success of many new creative businesses that will operate from them. The Hat District Cluster project has been boosted by £3.9m funding from SEMLEP's Local Growth Fund and £390K from Luton Borough Council. The Trust has also invested £1.75m into the project and is waiting to hear the outcome of applications to Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England for a further £1.8m. Subject to successful fundraising, the project will start July 2017 and be fully operational by 2022.

We have developed a self-funding business model for the Hat District Cluster. All income generated by the creative workspaces, ticketed events, hires and services are fully re-invested back into the cultural activities, operations, promotions, conservation and refurbishment of the buildings, new technology and events. This project will strengthen the Trust's position in delivering its long-term charitable objectives and provide a sustainable vibrant cultural core to Luton Town Centre.

### 2. Outputs

The Hat District Cluster will contribute significantly to the growth and development of Luton. By 2022, we will;

- Refurbish three historic hat factories into arts and cultural venues with work, show and share spaces
- Develop 2400sqm new and bespoke creative business workspace in the quarter
- Support, develop and enable 133 additional Creative and Digital Industries jobs
- Boost the Local Economy by attracting **135,000 more visits**.
- Save and care for three heritage buildings, one of which is listed in an ‘at risk’ conservation area.
- Provide an **economic impact of £29m** over ten years through visits, employment and spend.
- Grow a vibrant creative ecology and ‘life-style brand’ to market Luton widely and create a sense of pride.

### 3. Strategic Alignment

The Hat District Cluster project delivers city center regeneration, jobs, cultural and arts engagement, skills and talent development and heritage conservation. And by improving the Plaiters Lea Conservation area and boosting the image and sense of place for the Luton Cultural Quarter, this project addresses a significant number of local and regional priorities as follows:

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>SEMLEP</b>                | Creative and Cultural is a sector focus for SEMLEP and promoted through their ‘Strategic Economic Plan’, ‘Heritage, Sports, Visitor Economy, Cultural & Creative Industry Plan’.   |
| <b>Think Luton</b>           | The Luton Investment Framework includes the Luton Cultural Quarter which supports the Creative and Technology cluster, The Mall, Power Court and High Town developments.   |
| <b>Luton Borough Council</b> | Emerging Arts & Cultural 10 year Strategic plan, and future heritage strategy<br>Local Plan Policy LP11 Creative Quarter: Section A:3 states: ‘deliver the conversion of empty premises into studios and spaces for artists, work-live units and creative businesses’. |
| <b>Luton BID</b>             | (Business Improvement District): Objective 3 to provide a safe, attractive and appealing experience for visitors and workers in Luton town center to enjoy.  |
| <b>Central Govt</b>          | <b>Culture White Paper 2016</b> priorities include increasing life-chances through culture, enriching communities Internationalism and cross-sector investment.  |
| <b>Heritage Lottery</b>      | Luton is a priority development area in the East of England, they seek to invest further.  |
| <b>Arts Council</b>          | This project delivers the five Goals as outlined in <b>Achieving Great Arts &amp; Culture for Everyone</b> . ACE has identified Luton as a priority investment area.   |
| <b>Historic England</b>      | <b>Protection Result 4B2.201:</b> Luton’s industrial quarter: assessment of significance and heritage considerations for the Plaiters’ Lea Conservation Area   |

### 4. Market need

We commissioned a *Market Needs Assessment* in June 2016 (by Creative Space) which demonstrates that there is a need for creative business space in Luton and an appetite from the sector to relocate and cluster. It outlines that Luton has a rare commodity through its building stock in the cultural quarter, which is attractive to Creative and Digital Industries (CDI) especially those from London. Strong pull-factors for CDI:

- A cluster or critical mass of relevant skills and talent in one place and access to academics and graduates.
- Sufficient scale of infrastructure to add value to their own plans for business growth.
- Price balanced with a credible location that will help them attract/impress staff and host clients.
- Quality of workspace, events, networking and the quality of other companies within the cluster.
- Vibrant arts and cultural environment, activity and energy and ‘buzz’.
- Brand and profile alignment that will attract like-minded companies to relocate from London.

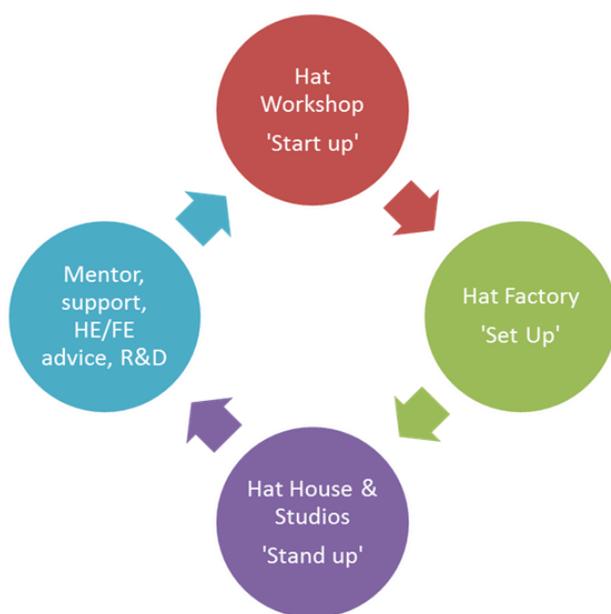
## 5. Creative Ecology

The Culture Trust is committed to developing arts and cultural skills and talents in people of all ages. The Hat District Cluster will operate as a 'creative ecology with a constant stream of new opportunities for inspiration, skills development, mentoring, jobs, freelance contracts, commissions, volunteering and business startup. The creative ecology nurtures and grows new talent, enables creative people to succeed, businesses to prosper and valuable collaborations to form.

**Hat Factory Arts Centre & Showroom** – Across these spaces, the Trust and our partners provide inspiration, quality, diversity and positive cultural role-models. People of all ages have the opportunity to engage in a range of free and ticketed arts and cultural activities as both audience and participant. We aim to engage more school children at the Hat Factory to start their creative explorations and inspirations at a young age. We hope to introduce a range of possible creative, arts and cultural careers. The Trust has an excellent track record of working with young people, and we are a committed and talented team. Our role is to provide development opportunities and career progression routes so that anyone with a talent or interest can take it further and succeed through the Hat District.

**Hat Works** – As a next step from School, University, College and/or the Hat Factory, we will provide opportunities for adults (18+) with skills and ideas who want to develop a creative and cultural business. The membership model will enable access to equipped workshops, co-working spaces, technology, support and collaborators. Hat Works and the Hat Factory provide start-up and step-up spaces for emerging creative practitioners to start their careers.

**Hat House and Studio spaces across the Hat District** will be developed to a very high standard for creative businesses to set up their own work spaces. We will provide a range of light, bright and inspiring spaces to nurture creativity and production. This critical mass of successful businesses (c30,000sqft) will be a self-supportive environment of like-minded creative and digital industries such as web-designers, graphic artists, architects, fashion, interiors, craft/makers, marketing agencies, gaming and new media/film to name but a few.



**Fig 2. The creative cluster ecology showing how skills and talent flow cyclically, providing progression routes for creative enterprise and practitioners wanting to evolve and grow their business and workspaces.**

We will promote progression between our sites and the ecology will ensure that our successful creative entrepreneurs can put-back into the system with support, advice, mentoring and contracting/co-working with some of our rising stars. Partnership working is key, and we will provide a platform to share debate and discussion with artists, creative practitioners, lecturers, researchers, businesses and inspiring workshop and educational leaders. We will provide a range of talent and skills development programmes at the Hat Factory and Hat Works, some free, some subsidised and some at full commercial rates. The Trust will both lead and be responsive to new and emerging practices/ideas and innovation.

## 6. Hat Factory Arts Centre

The Hat Factory is an imposing and impressive former hat factory on Bute Street in central Luton, situated between The Mall shopping center and the bus/railway station. The building was converted to an arts centre in the 90s and provides a 90 seat theatre, 200 person capacity flat floor events space/gallery, creative studios, café, basement bar, recording studio and meeting room facilities. It is a five-story industrial warehouse with large well-lit factory style spaces and an attractive vaulted brick basement. There is an inner courtyard which leads to a newer extension to the rear where the theatre and music venue which has been purpose built in the 1990s. Connors café at the front of the center on Bute Street is operated in house by our trading company and profits contribute to the charity and arts programming.

Luton Borough Council, SEMLEP local growth fund and Luton Culture are investing in the capital improvements. We have also applied to Arts Council England (Small-Scale Capital) to help develop this important arts resource.

The Capital Project will develop the Hat Factory to:

- Be more user-focussed, supporting skills and talent development, be welcoming and accessible to all.
- Attract and engage more audiences and users particularly young people and BME and Creative Businesses.
- Develop a more efficient building to ensure greater sustainability and reduced operational costs.



**Artist's impression of the Hat Factory showing the Beacon by Mark Titchner and examples of the type of curtain walling/weaving finish that may be considered to reflect the hat making heritage (Fabric Space)**

The Arts Centre facilities now require updating and we are planning a capital project which will enable us to meet audience and creative practitioner needs. The project aims to open access to the centre facilities, increased customer flow and enable more programme/income generation opportunities. Three areas will be redeveloped - the basement, ground floor and first floor. The Hat Factory will continue to present an inspirational intercultural arts programme, drawing on our strengths in theatre, music, film and comedy. We will continue to play a leading role in enriching the town's artistic ecology by presenting a diverse and relevant programme of national, regional and international work. New spaces for artists, designers, learners and emerging micro-businesses will be provided. We will continue to improve the quality and breadth of our offer to increase dwell time and encourage repeat visits. We will improve our management of audience data and identify gaps in usage, knowledge and reach. The capital project will intensify our work and enable greater sustainability for Luton Culture.

## 7. The Hat Works (47 Guildford Street)

This Grade II listed building is the oldest hat factory in Luton and situated in the heart of the Luton Cultural Quarter where Bute Street and Guildford Street connect. The building is currently empty and falling into disrepair. Recently purchase by the Trust, our plan is to safeguard this important heritage site. We have applied for Heritage Enterprise funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to help support the refurbishment.

The capital project will provide a sustainable cultural business with three key functions providing;

- Public reception, info point and showroom for cultural quarter visitors, members and Creative Businesses.
- Equipped workshops, co-working and start-up spaces for members and emerging micro-businesses.
- Historic meeting rooms with high-tech and digital facilities, training, advice and technical/IT/digital support.



### Equipped Workshops

The Hat Works provides entry-level access for creative, design and digital entrepreneurs and practitioners wanting to develop business ideas, services and products and to test markets. The Hat Works facilities are for members. Membership will enable individuals to further develop their creative skills, promote their work, collaborate, innovate and grow viable businesses into start-ups.

- **Members.** All users of the workshops and co-working and hot-desk space will be required to become members of the Hat District. An annual fee shall be charged and then an additional usage charge shall be made for booking a desk space, shared workshop space, equipment, training and technical support and meeting rooms. We will provide access to training, mentoring, and networks to support members to establish their creative ideas into micro-businesses. Set within the cultural quarter will further expose members to talent, collaborators, inspiration, wider business networks and markets. Some memberships will be free with the Trust's new bursary scheme, sponsored by local businesses.
- **Member facilities** will include a technical induction and additional support as and when required. The workshops will provide traditional equipment including sewing machines and presses alongside new technology such as laser-cutters and 3D printers. We will continually invest in up-to-date equipment and work with businesses in the area to integrate new working practices and innovation.

**Progression:** Successful start-ups will then be able to move into supported spaces within the workshop and some spaces at the Hat Factory Arts Centre. They can then progress onto independent spaces at Hat House and other studios across the District. We will encourage all successful creative businesses to re-invest their time, expertise and opportunities back into the membership through training, mentorship, work-shadowing, talks etc. This is how the creative ecology feeds itself and grows.



*Concept design of Hat Works Ground Floor reception area, information point and showroom (Fabric Space)*

### **Reception, information point and showroom**

The ground floor, with an entrance directly from Guildford Street, will meet and greet for all visitors to the Hat District Creative Cluster. The reception will provide bookings for rooms, services, training, talks, tours, workshops, inductions, meeting rooms and signposting to other sites. Resources will include promotional information, maps, contacts, free Wifi for members and member information. Post, telephone, IT, training and technical support services will also be available. Spaces for private functions, events, exhibitions, previews and product launches will also be available.



*Equipped workshops, co-working space and business start-up workshops (Images from Fabric Space)*

## 8. Hat House

Hat House is owned by the Trust and shall be tenanted space for creative businesses which shall pay full commercial rent. The income from this building shall subsidize the Trusts arts and cultural activity and the running costs of the Cluster. Hat House has two separate public entrances to the front and rear and is **11,913sqft** of space set over 4 floors with windows on three sides and a full-length basement. It has interior brick-walls, large windows and industrial features that are highly desirable to the sector. In Planning terms, we require a ground floor shop front and so we will select a tenant/creative business who will provide an offer that complements the cluster, such as a vintage clothes store, artisan food or bookshop. Communal areas will be minimised in order to maximise rentable space. Meeting rooms, catering, venues and reception services will be at the Hat Factory Arts Centre and the Hat Workshops.

## 9. Timescale

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>2017/18</b> | Start capital (Hat House and Hat Factory). Secure anchor tenants and partnerships |
| <b>2019</b>    | Complete and open Hat House and Hat Factory. Start capital (Hat Works)            |
| <b>2020/21</b> | Compete and open Hat Works. Secure 90% creative workspace occupation.             |

### For further information please contact:

Marie Kirbyshaw  
Chief Executive, Luton Culture  
01582 878121

## Further Notes

### Report Author: Luton Culture (2017)

Luton Culture is a registered arts and cultural charity. We have 150 staff, up to 12 Trustees and over 100 active volunteers who collectively enable arts and cultural activities and services to be delivered for over 1.5m visits. Established as a new charity in 2008, we receive £3.2m funding from London Luton Airport Limited and Luton Borough Council. We also generate funds from our trading company and through ticketed and partnership activity, events and projects. We showcase high quality arts and cultural activity across our three inspiring heritage sites; Stockwood Discovery Centre, Wardown House Museum and Gallery and The Hat Factory Arts Centre. We also deliver Library services for Luton Borough Council, manage community centres, and curate and develop public realm arts engagement projects. We encourage individuals and groups to enjoy and learn about arts and culture, engage with heritage and use their talents and interests to make a difference. We provide opportunities for people of all ages to take part in reading, writing, performing, making, creating, experimenting, discussing, collaborating and presenting culture. We actively support and showcase artistic talent, creativity and skill. Our aim is to create vibrancy, safeguard heritage and promote distinction through locally relevant and nationally important arts and cultural programmes, places and resources. Please see our business plan for more information <https://www.lutonculture.com/about-us/ourbusiness-plan/>

### Reports informing the Creative Cluster Plan:

- Capital costs were prepared for each site to RIBA stage1 by Buttress Architects (June 2016) revisions by Hewitt Freeborn in (Jan 2017).
- The Hat Works feasibility and business plan was produced by Fabric Space (May 2016 with revision in December 2016).
- Skills & Talent Pipeline paper by Luton Culture (May 2016).
- Market strength has been informed by a market needs report by Creative Space (June 2016).
- The financial modeling for 2022 has been undertaken by Luton Culture and is based on 90% occupancy of workspaces, average ticketed event take-up being 70% for all cluster programmes (currently 63% for all ticketed activity) and the 4-year profit and loss.
- Valuation reports for Hat Works and Hat Factory (Allsops).
- The Hat Factory Arts Centre feasibility was produced by Luton Culture, Fabric Space and Hewitt Freeborn and surveys (March 2017).
- Hat Works Feasibility was produced by Luton Culture and Hewitt Freeborn with input from above reports and surveys (April 2017).
- Economic Impact Assessment and data by DC Research, (May 2017).