

7b Case Study: The Kiln

WLEP BOARD RECOMMENDATION

The Board is asked to:

- Review and note the following example of The Kiln, a live commercial property market model in operation, to support discussion at the Board meeting; and
- Note that The Kiln, was initially delivered in partnership with Worcester City Council, following WLEP LGF investment into the project.

7.1 Context

- 7.1.1 Greg Smith and Hamish Gill are the owners of F8 Creates, which is a Visual Identity Design Agency based in Worcester. They founded this business specialising in brand design and videography, as well as websites and photography.
- 7.1.2 They have worked with both local and national companies across the UK. Starting up in Greg's attic, then Hamish's attic, and then growing into their own office, they saw a need for Creative Tech small businesses to connect and collaborate. So back in March 2016 they started a meetup group of like-minded people, 'Creative Techies'.
- 7.1.3 These were usually held in city centre pubs. Attendees listened to guest speakers over a pint of beer and a slice of pizza and it became a great success with ideas and connections coming out of the regular meetups.

7.2 The Kiln idea is born

- 7.2.1 During The Kiln meetups the idea of a space for people to come together first came to fruition. Once these conversations started within the community, this drew the attention of Worcester City Council, who unbeknownst to The Kiln community had already made the decision and plans to create a coworking space within Worcester.
- 7.2.2 Working with the guidance of Worcester City Council, as well as support from the LEP and the Worcestershire County Council, The Kiln Coworking CIC became a reality.
- 7.2.3 The coworking space needed to include hot desks, meeting rooms and facilities such as great wifi and refreshments.
- 7.2.4 The Old Police Station on Copenhagen Street seemed like the perfect venue with different rooms of different sizes in the centre of the city.

7.3 Phased Approach to Opening

- 7.3.1 In October 2018, whilst the works on 2 Copenhagen Street were being completed, The Kiln settled into its first home on the High Street known as The Kiln 0.5. This space (within the Guildhall) was loaned to the project by the City Council and enabled The Kiln to build a small community of members before being fully functional on Copenhagen Street.
- 7.3.2 From the 1st of July 2019, The Kiln took on a Centre Manager, to be centre of the community of co-workers, and shortly after this, The Kiln as we know it today, opened on Copenhagen Street on the 5th of August 2019.

- 7.3.3 The official launch party was held on the 5th of September and was attended by council members and local businesses. From that point on The Kiln held events such as 'Kiln Founders' which brought together small business owners to listen to guest speakers over a pizza.
- 7.3.4 The Kiln also held small meetups like Kiln Kickstart, which still runs today and is an accountability session run by business coaches from local business, Real World Consultancy, bringing together Kiln members and external business owners.
- 7.3.5 As more members joined the Kiln we saw people start working together, gaining advice from each other and supporting each other.

7.4 The Impact of COVID-19

- 7.4.1 In March 2020 The Kiln closed its doors, as did a lot of businesses when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, and Government guidance dictated that members were told to work from home. As the rules eased in July 2019, The Kiln was able to reopen while taking precautions. Over the next 9 months The Kiln followed government guidance and closed on two more occasions, before being able to fully reopen in March 2021.
- 7.4.2 The want to be around other people and change in the way people worked saw membership grow to its highest levels. We saw new businesses starting and using The Kiln as their base.
- 7.4.3 A perfect example of this was Hollywell Homes, a remote estate agency, who started up in May 2021. Adam Paske, the business owner, launched his business from The Kiln and used the connections created within the Kiln to grow and grow. With accountants, book-keepers, architects and business coaches part of the community, there is always support on hand.

7.5 Types of businesses, performance and feedback

- 7.5.1 The Kiln has become a hub for small businesses with connections to an array of organisations that can support these businesses. Within The Kiln there is a wonderful community of like-minded people working in Creative Tech, Start Up and supporting businesses.
- 7.5.2 Following a recent survey by members, 84% of those who completed it said their business had grown since becoming a member of The Kiln. We also had feedback such as the below comments:

"The Kiln is the most fantastic co-working space ideally located in the heart of Worcester. The facilities are superb and the accessibility and community have allowed me to setup, grow and develop my own business from scratch. I'm confident to say that I would not have made a fraction of the progress without The Kiln. Alex and the team are a complete credit to The Kiln and I would highly recommend The Kiln to anyone who needs a professional space to be creative and productive, within a brilliant and friendly community."

"The Kiln is the most productive co-working space I have ever worked in! It has the perfect mix of flexibility, whilst providing opportunities to meet and work with like-minded organisations. However, it's more than just a co-working space; it's been a haven during these last 2 years, providing the much-needed distraction from home-working, opportunities to socialise, opportunities to talk with colleagues in a supportive, non-judgemental way, and a really positive atmosphere for working."

"As a charity, we don't measure our success by increased profitability as such, or increased product ranges, and therefore this questionnaire doesn't really justify the support that the kiln can bring to people. But it's so much more than that. It's the welcoming face of Alex and Becky, to the support of colleagues that aren't even in your sector of work, but can still

share good practice, it's the workshops, the social events, the yoga, the coffee, and the people."

"I have been at the kiln now for well over 2 years and have thoroughly enjoyed every working minute. It's a real asset to the city of Worcester and I couldn't advocate it anymore! Thank you for your support."

Alex Brookes

Centre Manger @ The Kiln