



## **NEWTOWN WORKS FILM STUDIOS – BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND DETAIL OF OPERATIONS**

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This note is intended to provide Ashford Borough Council with an overview of how the proposed Film Studios at Newtown Works would function once complete and operational. The rationale for the development and the benefits for Ashford are also highlighted. It has been informed by inputs from the Creative District Improvement Company (TCDI Co.) and its specialist operating studio company TIME + SPACE Studios who would manage the operation of the site.

### **The Rationale for the Development**

The latest economic growth figures show the creative industries sector grew at five times the rate of the wider economy, in real terms, from 2017-2018. The sector is now worth £111.7bn in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the UK - £35 billion more than the automotive, life sciences, aerospace and oil and gas industries combined. It grew by 7.4% in real terms over the period, compared to a 1.4% rate of growth for the economy as a whole. All sectors within the creative industries have reported real-term growth with Film, TV, radio and photography increasing by 3%. The creative industries now make up 5.8% of the UK economy.

This growth is matched by the need for modern studio space. The emergence for major global players such as Netflix and Amazon Prime and the streaming only operations from some of the more traditional players such as Disney with their Disney+ operation means that demand is fast outstripping supply.

Research by Lambert Smith Hampton indicates that up to 1.9 million sq.ft of new film studio space is required in the UK. The industry considers this to be a very conservative estimate, as much of the existing and emerging studio space is subject to exclusivity leases and is not freely available on the market. In reality, it is estimated that the need is in the region of 2.5 million sq.ft. The UK is very attractive to global film makers due to a supportive policy framework, favourable tax system, the availability of a skilled workforce and talent, and the cultural appeal.

Kent already has a presence in the media industry with the likes of format TV at Maidstone Studios and the popularity of the county for location filming however, Newtown Works provides an opportunity develop the High-End streaming offer, to capitalise on the growth and create a new sector for the Ashford economy, utilising the town locational benefits.

The framework for growth and investment in the creative industries is set out in detail in the Economic Benefits Statement that accompanies the planning application.

### **Why Ashford?**

Almost 45% of location filming in the South East takes place in Kent. High profile productions such as the Avengers: Age of Ultron, James Bond, Into The Woods, Wolf Hall, The Tunnel, Rush and Great Expectations were all filmed in the County but currently there is no facilities to allow the production process to be retained locally. Kent has a track record in Hollywood. Ashford is centrally located and easily accessible from most parts of Kent meaning that it is well placed to accommodate such a facility. As a result, there is a massive opportunity to capitalise on the success of this location filming and secure the studio filming elements of these productions and to create a top-class production hub. This would be hugely attractive to the industry.

The Kent Film Office plays a pivotal role in promoting the County for the film and broadcasting industries. Filming activity alone currently generates on average more than £3 million direct spend into the Kent & Medway economies every year. The Film Office supports local sector infrastructure to maximise the Kent offer to the creative industries including a skills base and local support facilities. Screen South is also critical to the success ensuring access, promotion and skills are supported. The Proposed Development would seek to build on this strong foundation.

Ashford has strong transport links both to the Continent and the London International Airports, which makes it an attractive area for filmmakers. Central London is accessible in less than 40 minutes. There are now rail services to a number of key European cities. Netflix's EMEA headquarters is located in Amsterdam and there is a twice daily service from Ashford.

In addition, the town benefits from a high quality electricity supply and fibre capabilities which are fundamental infrastructure components required for the success of film studio operations.

Ashford sits within the Thames Estuary Production Corridor as a "Cultural Impact Area". There is an ambitious industrial vision to develop a world-class hub for cultural and creative production, leading global innovation, creating new jobs, developing talent and supporting the rapid growth of the creative economy.

The market signals in Ashford are favourable. It is expected that rental values for the new studios will be in the region of £25/sq.ft, which when compared to £70/sq.ft in London, represents very good value. In an increasingly competitive market, the opportunity to keep the cost base low is a strong selling point.

Ashford already displays a buoyant weekend economy linked to the success of the Ashford Designer Outlet, the Curious Brewery and other recent developments in the town. The Film Studios will add to this offer and build the visitor economy of the town.

### **TIME + SPACE Studios**

[TIME + SPACE Studios](#) is the fastest growing family of film and TV studios in the UK. Offering both world-class studios and hospitality services to its clients.

The existing network includes [Twickenham Film Studios](#) in West London and [Littlewoods Studios](#) in Liverpool. We intend to operate [Ashford International Studios](#) at Newtown Works in Ashford, Kent.

This operating platform managed by urban regeneration specialists [The Creative District Improvement Co.](#) is committed to operating one million square feet of production space by 2024 to satisfy the growing demand for available studio and production space in the UK and signal a new benchmark in quality across the industry.

### **The Film Studio Proposal**

The proposed Film Studio development at Newtown Works comprises of the following elements:

- Film Studios – 7,440sqm (4 x 1,860sqm studios) [20,000sq ft per studio/ 80,000sq.ft total]
- Production Offices - 7,450sqm
- Workshop – 1,300sqm
- Media Village – 2,660sqm
- Commercial space – 8,735sqm (Use Class D1/B1)
- Gym/ Restaurant – 1,055sqm (Use Class A3/D2); and
- Hotel – 120 hotel rooms with 62 serviced apartments, Food and Beverage, Conference Centre, restaurant and leisure/ function space.

Figure 1: Newtown Works Film Studios CGI



The characteristics and function of each of the elements of the proposed development for screen-based media production is presented below:

- *Film Studios / Sound Stages* – Sound stages are large soundproofed (acoustically treated) buildings which offer enclosed, high quality and technically controlled facilities for shooting film and recording dialogue. They have structural elements built in, such as lighting gantries with sufficiently engineered weight loading capacities and electrical infrastructure designed for filming.

Figure 2 - 'Iron Lady' Film Set – Twickenham Studios



- *Production Offices* - Offices are used by staff employed by an individual production company for the creative, managerial, financial and administrative functions of a production. Office-type space can also be used by productions for dressing rooms, make-up and hair rooms, wardrobe, meeting rooms, flexible utility spaces and for editing picture and sound. These are often occupied on a short-term basis to coincide with productions. They are also occupied by companies providing a range of media-based support services to the production companies. A small amount of floorspace will be permanently occupied to manage, operate and maintain the site.
- *Workshops* - Workshops are used for the construction of sets and props. The workshops are also used by departments like camera, lighting, costume and art departments for storage. The costume and art departments especially need adequate levels of localised set storage (including sufficient height for large pieces of flat-age that need lean to areas) and for various props (pieces) used on and off the sets that can range in size and scale depending on the subject matter. Mezzanine levels on upper floors are helpful for housing lightweight office accommodation. A number of recent productions have begun using workshops as linear production lines where teams specialise in a certain process and the set props move down the line in a production process. The workshops will have double height doors/ loading bays for HGVs and trucks to access with tailgates. These should be positioned conveniently close to the film stages.

Figure 3 – Filming on Set



- *Media Village* – this space would be used by creative companies involved in providing support services such as design and marketing. The benefits of developing a cluster of like-minded freelancers and SME's onsite is three-fold. Firstly, their presence will help to reinforce Ashford's reputation as being an established production hub on par with recognised locations like Pinewood, Elstree or Leavesden. Having other businesses based onsite presents a huge advantage for visiting producers using the studios, as their services often become an integral (if not crucial) component of the shooting process, which is an incredibly expensive process where time is money. For example, a special effects (SFX) company could prove invaluable to the productions schedule by having facilities available onsite at short notice. Secondly, the businesses in the Media Village gain direct access to the studios' principal clientele. This boosts the trading performance of the SMEs and impacts exponentially on the growth of the company. This process is called the "halo effect" which is proven to increase productivity and direct employment levels. Thirdly, and in conclusion these factors combined ultimately delivers a vibrant, eco-system of like-minded companies trading both inside and outside of the studio complex that impacts positively on the local economy.

Figure 4 – Newtown Works CGI



- *Commercial space* – Discussions are underway to partner with local educational bodies to establish places for people to learn creative trades which could take place within the commercial element of the scheme. TCDI Co. is proactively exploring partnerships with the local education bodies to develop a higher educational training course that will provide students with unprecedented first-hand, practical experience of working within a live film and TV studio complex. The proposal will provide students with a more holistic, understanding of the industry with the curriculum delivered over a number of “bite-sized”, departmental courses designed to create a better awareness and appreciation of the overall production process behind producing that is formed of multiple disciplines. By providing such grass roots access this initiative will help to address skills gaps in the screen industries via training and work placements. In doing so will ultimately drive direct employment opportunities in ways that enrich the cluster of businesses onsite and enhance the overall eco-system in Ashford. Alternatively, the commercial space will be used as offices for supporting activities.
- *Backlot* – this is typically open land used for the construction of exterior sets, temporary storage and for the parking of vehicles associated with film and television production. The space constraints of the site at Newtown Works mean that there is no backlot within the proposed development. The ultimate backlot for these studios is the Kent countryside and network of towns which have a well-established profile for location filming. In addition, other suitable sites in the town may be considered for backlot activities where this is considered to be an acceptable meanwhile use.

*Figure 5: Filming Activities*



- *Hotel and serviced apartments* - Creative businesses work with an evolving body of people, so schemes include hotels and serviced apartments that can accommodate visiting crews, cast and family. The serviced apartments will also be used in a Green Room capacity for actors to meet, relax and spend time before and after filming. The 120-bedroom hotel will also include a conference space, restaurants and leisure/ function space. It is intended that the conference space will accommodate a bespoke programme of creative industries themed events.

*Figure 6 – Hotel and Serviced Apartments CGI*

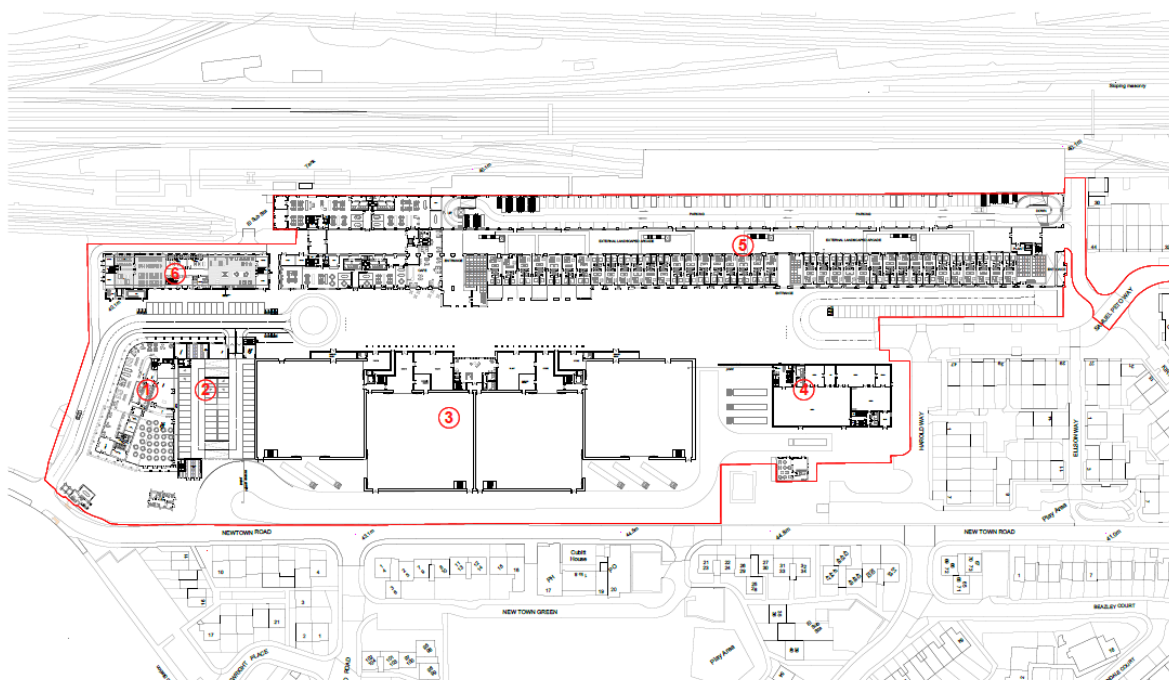


The location of the components on the scheme are shown on the plan below:



**Figure 7 – Newtown Works Site Layout Plan**

- |                               |                           |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| ① Hotel & Serviced Apartments | ④ Workshop/ Media Village |
| ② Multi-story Car Park        | ⑤ Locomotive Sheds        |
| ③ Film Studios                | ⑥ Engine Shed             |



## Justification for the scale of development

### Film studios

The proposal seeks to provide four film studios of c.20,000 sq.ft resulting in an overall floorspace of 80,000 sq.ft. This is considered to be the 'sweet-spot' in terms of floorspace and is driven by market demand. This format provides flexibility where one to four studios can be leased depending on the production requirements. This floorspace is well-suited toward premium TV production. This area will allow for three or four scenes per studio which represents a very efficient use of space.

The supply of studios of this scale has been somewhat limited, with many of the emerging schemes seeking to provide film studios in the region of 50,000 sq.ft which is better suited to film production. This means that there is a gap in the market for premium TV production.

### Hotel and serviced apartments

The proposal includes a 120-bedroom hotel and ancillary services as well as 62 serviced apartments. This number of hotel and serviced apartments is largely operator driven and provides the economies of scale for a successful operation. On a typical production in the region of 20% of staff will stay on-site. If the studios are at capacity this equates to demand for 120 rooms/ apartments alone. Combined with this, will be demand from the conferencing facilities, related business activity and location filming workers.

In addition, it is expected that 5-10 of the hotel rooms and serviced apartments will be retained as available for Green Room functions for actors to meet, relax and spend time before and after filming.

On this basis, studio related occupancy would be high. The occupancy is forecast at 80% in year 1, increasing gradually to 92% in year 5. This is entirely consistent with occupancy levels being reported by equivalent sized studios across the U.K and given current and future market demands.

## **Proposed format**

The hotel and serviced apartments are proposed within a 20-storey building at the site entrance. The exemplar design is intended to provide a new landmark and icon for Ashford. This is conducive with vision for the scheme as a whole, which is intended to be unique and aspirational.

As part of the design evolution of the scheme, different configurations of the uses were tested. The site is relatively constrained and in order to accommodate the complementary uses and a viable scheme, the optimum design solution is to provide a taller element. This is considered to be more considerate to the listed buildings and the neighbouring areas. There are logistical and cost constraints associated with building on top of studios which make it unfeasible to pursue. For example, the studios are sensitive to noise pollution. The structural engineering costs of construction would also be prohibitively expensive.

## **Helicopter pad**

The proposal does not currently incorporate space for a helicopter pad. The configuration of the hotel/serviced apartment building does not have a flat roof to accommodate this. It is not suitable to provide it on the roof of the studios due to potential issues with noise but also it is intended to provide green roofs and PV panels on these buildings.

TCDI Co. do not consider this to detract from the film studio offer.

## **Use**

The film studios will house what are known as single camera feature film or drama productions. In this single camera setup, each of the various shots and camera angles are taken using the same camera, or multiple cameras pointed in one direction, which are moved and reset to get each shot or new angle. Single-camera is mostly reserved for prime-time dramas, made-for-TV movies, music videos and commercial advertisements. Examples of this include: The Crown, Downton Abbey, Stranger Things, Mission Impossible or the Avengers. In recent times major streaming services like Netflix have built their business model and entire platforms by developing original content around single camera feature films and drama productions.

## **Access**

The Film Studios will require access for large trucks and HGVs which will be transporting equipment and materials for set construction.

Vehicle access to the Film Studios will be provided at the northern end of the site off of Newtown Road. It is proposed to construct a dedicated vehicle access that runs parallel to Newtown Road which provides access to each studio and the workshops to the south of the site. Outside the workshops will be a turning circle which will enable large trucks and HGVs to safely turn around, return past the studios and exit the site onto Newtown Road. Full details of the transport impacts are set out in the Transport Assessment supporting the planning application.

On an occasional basis, specialist cherry pickers and/or lighting vehicles will be used in outside areas. On-site space will be allocated to park location vehicles, such as catering vans.

## **Production Activity**

It should be noted that each production is different and schedules will be bespoke to meet the requirements. The proposed studios could house 3 or 4 productions working simultaneously in each studio with between 50-150 people per production. The highest number of individuals will be on site during filming, with significantly fewer individuals on site for pre- and post- production. At capacity the site could have 600 individuals utilising the studio complex.

Average productions range from 10-30 weeks in duration. However, it is not uncommon for occupiers/users to pre-let space for longer periods of up to 5 years, using the studio for their own

purposes for projects lasting anything between 6, 12 or 15 months. In more recent times producers have been booking studio space for 6 months or even years ahead in order to secure any available film stage space in the U.K.

Each production will have a unique schedule bespoke to their needs. Volumes of traffic is dictated by the demands of the individual production schedules. The most intensive periods of movement are usually at the beginning and the end of each hire period. This is due to deliveries of equipment and materials for building sets inside the studio and then again at the end of the hire period to strike the sets. Once the set building process is complete a filming begun, movement levels significantly decrease, apart from that of individuals involved in the production. Movements will include HGVs / articulated lorries however, the majority of vehicles will be smaller. i.e. mini vans, transit vans, crew cars. Accordingly, there is unlikely to be a reoccurring/ repeating daily pattern of vehicle movements and traffic generation.

### **Studio occupancy**

Although the film/TV production industry is ad-hoc and project based, the following provides an estimate of the activity/usage of each studio with any given year:

- Studio 1 – approximately 80%
- Studio 2 – approximately 80%
- Studios 3 and 4 – approximately 80%, with a cross over provision that caters for all 4 studios being used simultaneously for up to 20% of the time.

There would be careful scheduling between the studio management team and the producers to ensure the storage and logistical elements result in the end user getting access when required but does not do so in any way that 1) delays other workers in the studio or 2) disrupts any neighbouring businesses or 3) impact negatively on the public including highways adjacent to the studio entrance.

### **Hours of Operation**

Film crews typically work a 10-hour day shooting on set, starting at around 8am and concluding around 7pm with a 1-hour lunch break. However, many workers (crew and cast) get onto the set one hour before and leave one hour after these times, as a result, operations at the site can be from between 6am to 9pm. On rare occasions, it will be necessary to use the studio outside of these hours. These patterns help to reduce the traffic impact on peak hour time periods.

### **Day to Day Operational Patterns**

Once the production is in situ at the studio complex, the pattern becomes very consistent for the duration of any given booking. The crew and its personnel are largely contained into one or more of the studios. Access into these spaces is largely exclusive to the clients only so the operation is private and secured and quiet. To the extent passers-by would likely be unaware that a major film or television series is being produced on a daily basis.

The primary operational challenge is when handling the arrival and departure of both crew and vehicles into the complex. i.e: deliveries of equipment and materials for building set(s) inside the studio and at then the same again at the end of the hire period to strike the set(s). Such movement is often minimal once the set building process is completed and when filming starts.

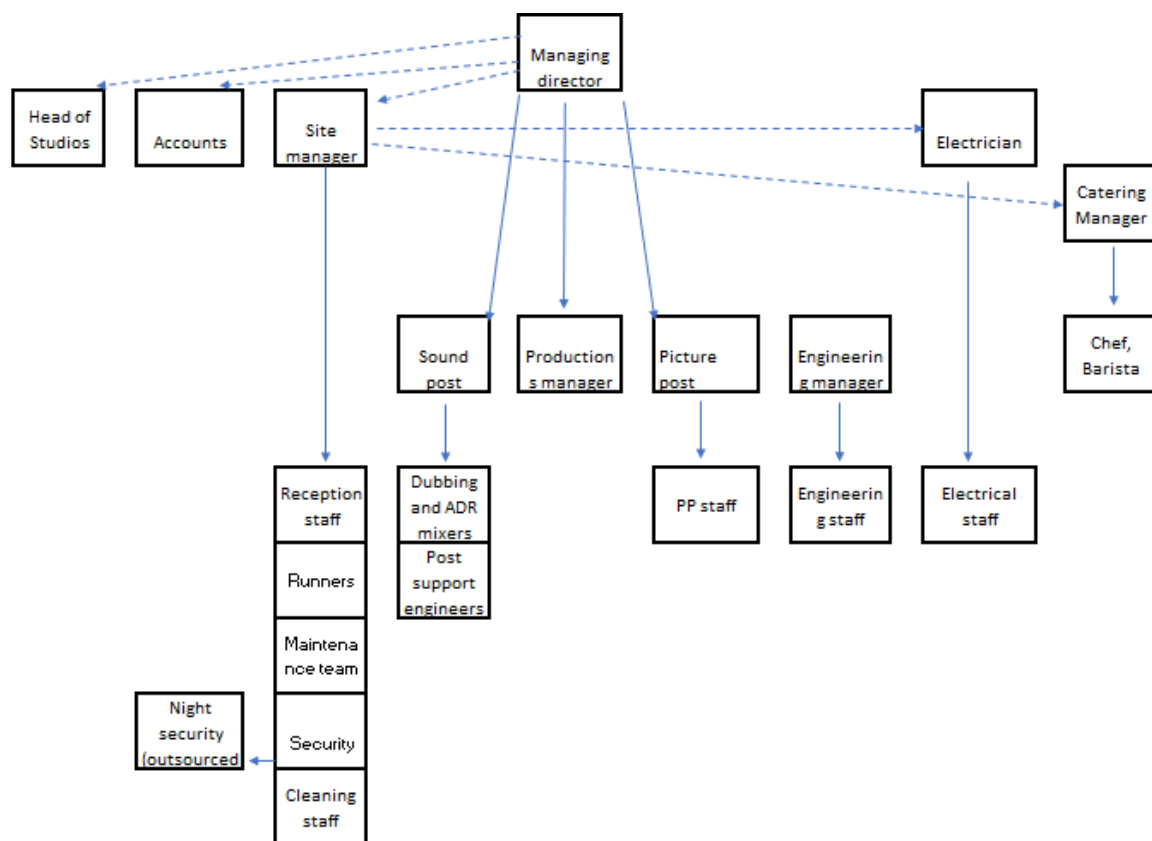
There will be a security check-in for all people arriving to site to support health and safety and protect intellectual property being produced on site by clients.

The studio management team will work closely with clients, the producers, to ensure such logistical elements are handled seamlessly, to provide physical access when required that minimises disruption to other people working onsite and without disrupting neighbouring residents or businesses. Our experience can ensure that efficient scheduling will minimise the impact on the adjacent public highway into the studio entrance that will be kept clear at all times. Again, with health and safety being of prime consideration at all times.

### Staffing

The studios will be managed by a strong team with proven track record. The key management has years of experience of managing studios around the country and their breadth of knowledge will enable the studios to function successfully from the onset. The management will be able to draw resources from the other sites under operation and will form a core team to oversee the day to day running of the business.

The organogram below provides an indicative structure related to the management of the film studio operations.



## What are benefits for Ashford?

The potential benefits are wide-ranging.

### Economic Benefits

The proposed development scheme is expected to deliver significant economic benefits which are set out in detail in the Economic Benefits Statement supporting the planning application.

In summary, approximately **2,000 direct FTE permanent jobs** could be supported once the scheme is fully occupied. In addition, the proposals will meet an identified need to bring forward new studio space to support growth in the Film/TV industry and wider creative industries.

The nature of the activities on site will support jobs at a range of skill and wage levels, providing employment opportunities for all parts of the community; but the bulk of the additional jobs – totalling 1,760 jobs – will be within the film/TV studios and related activities. Within this there will be a focus on high quality jobs, which will contribute to improving the earnings profile of those living and working within the town; and to narrowing the productivity gap between Ashford and the wider South East region. It will provide at least 1,530 jobs for Borough residents.

In addition to the direct operational jobs, the analysis undertaken indicates that the development scheme will:

- Support growth of **£104 million in GVA** per year, contributing to sustainable growth in the size of Ashford's economy;
- Support **£10.4 million** annual spending from visitors and residents, of which it is estimated that £8.9 million will be retained within the Ashford Borough economy. This will contribute positively to supporting the vitality and viability of Ashford Town Centre and building the weekend economy;
- Support construction investment of **£152 million** during the construction phase of development, which it is estimated will support direct construction employment of **585 jobs and a further 880 indirect jobs** through spending and supply chain effects per year of construction. This will contribute **£113 million per annum to GVA** over the construction period; and
- Support growth in the Borough Council's income through direct taxation including **£2.9 million** through Business Rates. This will assist in securing the Council's financial independence from Government funding.

### The "Halo Effect" and the Supply Chain

The proposal includes a significant amount of commercial space, workshop space and Media Centre to accommodate businesses linked to the operations of the film studios but also those attracted to co-location.

There is a number of known suppliers who have indicated that they will locate on site. Filming is carefully programmed and therefore there is a need for suppliers to be available locally to reduce the propensity for delays and to improve efficiency. The lighting, camera and dolly grip specialists located at Twickenham Studios will also have a presence at Newtown Works. There will also be costume companies, set designers and postproduction media companies.

Top-class facilities tend to attract creatives looking to share information, skills and ideas with likeminded people irrespective of whether they are directly employed by the film studios. Part of the

vision for the scheme is to create a creative industries cluster and local businesses will want to be part of that and to benefit from the synergy.

The intention is to provide a diary or call service within the studio complex. This service will allow local freelancers to register and have their diaries managed for bookings within the productions in the film studios.

Film studios tend to have a significant supply chain associated with filming activities including catering companies, security firms, DIY suppliers and plant companies amongst others. There is a preference towards using local businesses. Furthermore, the operations tend to use local trades people such as carpenters and electricians. Local suppliers are generally more cost and time efficient. It is estimated that each stage generates spending of £25,000 per hour in the local area. As a result, supply chain businesses tend to orbit around film studios and a high proportion of the benefits are captured locally.

### **Education and Skills**

TCDI Co. is engaged in on-going discussions with a number of local education providers, namely – East Kent College, Christchurch University and Kent University, with a view to providing technical training on-site and developing the creatives of the future. These three education bodies have successfully collaborated on other ventures and therefore can demonstrate a track record. The studios will be a catalyst for many new entrants and training opportunities to enhance the talent and skills supply chain needed to support the studios. This will provide a viable opportunity to create a centre of excellence for learning that could be internationally recognised. The concept is centred on students being able to study courses and gain practical experience within the media cluster being created.

As a follow on, the scheme will provide a Future Media Centre in collaboration with Kent's leading education, skills and R&D providers which will provide unparalleled skills development, education and training and R&D programmes and will aim to help establish new start-up creative industries businesses

TCDI Co. is also progressing with "The Accelerator" which will be a 5,000sq ft facility within the media village. The particular focus of the facility will be as a "next step" for micro-businesses and SMEs which emerge from the Future Media Centre to be housed close by in the adjacent educational hub onsite.

These initiatives provide an opportunity to foster niche, industry skills in Ashford and will help to retain talent within the Borough for the long-term. By building professional relationships and providing post qualification employment opportunities, as well as a supportive environment for entrepreneurial spirit, there will be a great incentive for people to stay in Ashford.

### **Cultural Offer**

Ashford will attract more screen-related tourism as a result of the proposals and benefit from this lucrative industry that is currently valued at £550 million nationally. The combination of the film studios and the high-quality hotel offer provides an excellent asset for Ashford.