

Hat District Future-scape 2020

A Hat District Creative Community Co-Authored Paper.

01	Foreword
02	Introduction
03	The Hat District Today
04	A Vision for the Future
05	Designation
06	Area Principles
07	Project Ideas
08	Next Steps
09	Co-authors

2019. Commissioned by the Culture Trust, Luton with designs by Fabric Space.

Cover: 'Promise' by Jonathan Barnbrook and Mark Titchner. Installed on the Gurney Hat Factory wall in the Hat District October 2019.



Image by Marie Kirbyshaw

Fig 1. The Hat District, Central Luton as viewed from the Station external stair. 2019

01: Foreword

“Luton is a passionate, proud and creative place driven by an energy that derives from its people and its history. This future-scape is fueled by a small group of cultural entrepreneurs who have a stake in the current cultural fabric of the Hat District in Central Luton and who wish to share ideas, open debate and activate cross-sector collaboration.

This future-scape is unashamedly ambitious and prioritises culture. We believe that the Hat District should be jam-packed with cultural venues, independent and ethical traders, complementary bar and food culture and creative businesses. We want to integrate affordable live and work workspaces for entrepreneurs and creative practitioners (our cultural ‘key workers’). We welcome a mix of inspiring architecture and cared for heritage buildings and we want to continue our industrious reputation for making, designing and manufacturing. Importantly, we welcome complementary developments around the brim of our Hat District cultural core which will help create a dynamic and prosperous community.

We hope this future-scape will inform policy, place-making and planning and that some of our ideas become a reality. We also hope to inspire more dreams to be shared and more entrepreneurial spirit to rise high. In 2017 we commissioned ‘Beacon’ by Mark Titchner for the gable end of the Hat Factory Arts Centre (see fig 3) - it says ‘If you can dream it you must do it’ and it seemed to set the tone for a new sense of positivity. Two years later, we launch ‘the Promise’, a collaboration between Mark Titchner and Jonathan Barnbrook (cover). This new public work will be installed on the wall of the Old Gurney Hat Factory – it states ‘The future demands your participation’. This collaborative paper aims to inspire just that.”

Marie Kirbyshaw, Hat District Project Director and Chief Executive of the Culture Trust, Luton.



Image by Fabric Space

Fig 2. Visualization of Guildford Street within the Hat District showing heritage and contemporary architecture sitting side by side

02: Introduction

Why now? This is a Hat District creative community *co-authored* paper. It was written predominantly in 2019 but is being published in May 2020 during the height of Coronavirus global pandemic and UK lock-down. We believe the vision and hope outlined in this paper is needed now more than ever. Whilst COVID-19 will leave a legacy of hardship and recession, Luton has experienced economic difficulties before and has a reputation for creatively reinventing itself, being entrepreneurial and not giving up. Luton’s communities are resilient - we are open to working together particularly during times of need and we have a collective goal to grow pride in what we do, who we are, and in what our town represents.

Throughout this paper, we focus on the Hat District in our Town Centre. We want to encourage more pride in this area and support authorities, funders, idea generators and decision makers with a vision for what could be – we call this a ‘future-scape’. Collectively, and as a community, we could make a great place exemplary.

Physically in the town centre there are many development opportunities, gap sites and regeneration possibilities that are prime for investment. We wish for this ‘future-scape’ to inspire everyone to say “no” to inappropriate developments and poor quality architecture that is adversely affecting this important conservation area and “yes” to investments, ideas and developments that contribute to the totality of a shared vision.

Already the Town centre has attracted major inward investment in Power Court retail and sports venue soon to be home to Luton Town Football Club next to the Hat District. The centre also boasts a growing University with new STEM department and has secured Local growth funding to transform historic hat factories into creative workspaces and Luton Airport has also announced plans to nearly double capacity by 2022.

This Hat District Future-scape paper paints a picture of what could be, and how we could make this great cultural asset a world-class creative community and visitor destination.

03: The Hat District today

The Hat District is a conservation area which was once a thriving community of hat factories, production and international trade. It is now a sad shadow of the wealth it once boasted, but early adopters are seeing its potential and investors are making a difference including the Culture Trust, University of Bedfordshire, Youthscape, the Bear Club, Historic England, Arts Council England, Luton Borough Council, SEMLEP and National Lottery Heritage Fund. The Hat District combines a growing mass of cultural venues, organisations and independent businesses and it's ready to take off.

A strength is the location. We believe that the Hat District is the best located creative cluster in the UK, possibly Europe. It's positioned between the town centre and the station, where it takes 5 minutes to get to the Airport for international connectivity and 22 minutes to get to/from London.

Our Hat Heritage. We have a world-class hat making history, heritage and we have a wealth of historic buildings that once boasted a hat making industry and international trading. The Panama Hat Company has recently taken up a new space in an old factory Hat House and has reintroduced international trading to the district. The old factories are rich in architectural and historic importance and the large-scale buildings proudly host institutions, creatives and youth projects.

A weakness is the lack of an area master plan and for heritage care. The Hat District is part of The Plaiters Lea Conservation Area which is designated 'At Risk'. Many of the buildings are not well looked after or they have been inappropriately developed. Permitted development rights have led to residential conversions – a use that is out of pace with any cultural quarter ambition for outdoor events, music licensing and 24/7 vibrancy. The rise in residential conversion and low standard of refurbishment is a significant risk to the prosperity of the area and currently there is no master plan, heritage and conservation enforcement. The Council is investing in the development of a new Town-Centre development Framework and we hope this future-scape will inform part of this.

Both a strength and a weakness is the development opportunity: Speculative developments for high-rise and intense developments in the area are currently ad-hoc. Our hope is that this future-scape will attract partners and developers who have an empathy for the heritage and a shared approach to improve the quality of our environment, public realm, art, architecture, street furniture, signage and conservation. The Culture Trust, Luton has recently refurbished two old hat factories - Hat House and the Hat Factory Arts Centre and is poised to develop the oldest hat factory in Luton, 47 Guildford Street. The University has refurbished the Alexon building which now houses art and design students and Youthscape refurbished the redbrick landmark building in the District in 2017. With the assurance of high quality developments like these, we are aware of just how much additional potential there if the right partnerships can be achieved with investors and developers. With careful planning and development of the whole district we are confident the District will attract a presence for anchor organisations - helped by incentives, low costs and proximity to London. But a planning framework protecting culture at the core is key.

Artist's Animation: Inaugural public artworks 'The Beacon' by Mark Titchner (Fig 3), 'Hat Pin' by Tom Pearman (Fig 11) and 'The Promise' by Jonathan Barnbrook and Mark Titchner (cover) represent an artist's response to place. A series of ephemeral, performance based and interactive artworks have been commissions as part of 'As you Change So Do I' project 2017-19 funded by Arts Council England, which has helped re-interpret the Hat District as a creative destination. The digital window of the Hat Factory outwardly shares new work by the Hat District creative pioneers – a young and dynamic team of creatives seeking to grow their talents locally. Public art has raised the profile of the Hat District, questioned and engaged users and passers-by and has triggered a new positivity about Luton.



Photograph by Aleksandra Warchol

Fig 3 'The Beacon' artwork by Mark Titchner on the Hat Factory Arts Centre with the Storefront Gallery on the left.

The existing cultural spaces are:

Hat Factory Arts Centre - launched in the 90s and refurbished in 2019 this well-loved and used old factory has a studio theatre, comedy bar, cafe, 'hatch-1' and hatch2 education workshops, a bursary artist's studio and two floors for emerging and growing creative industries. 'The Beacon' public artwork on the side of the Hat Factory Arts Centre is by Turner Prize nominee Mark Titchner and was commissioned by the Culture Trust, Luton in 2016. This large-scale and illuminated work has provided a well-loved message to the 8000 people who pass on Bute Street from the Station to the Town Centre every day.

"What is 'Beacon'? It's a big, brightly coloured artwork and it even lights up. It is also there waiting for you when you arrive by train to Luton. And what does it mean to be greeted by this large scale artwork when you arrive in the town? It shows that there is a desire to say that art is important here and that it should be part of the life of the town. It shows a willingness to provoke, to debate, to disagree but most of all to start the conversation. A conversation about what art is, what it might be and who it is for. A conversation that everybody should be involved with and made welcome to."

Mark Titchner, lead artist for As You Change So Do I Hat District public realm project 2016-2019.

Hat House - an imposing five-floor hat factory in the heart of the district opening in 2019 after major refurbishment by the Culture Trust, Luton. The building provides workspace for the creative industries from hat makers and designers to creative media and an amazing foody basement. Hat House and the Hat Factory Arts Centre are part of a cluster of four creative workspaces soon be joined by *Hat Studios* creative workspace and *Hatworks* which will open in 2021.

The Corner – a stage for art, installations, projections and ideas - a soapbox for ranters and ravers, activists and buskers. Mark Titchner and Jonathan Barnbrook's 'the promise' (cover) shouts from the wall behind it "the future demands your participation" and the corner provides free space to do so.



Image by Justin Doherty

Fig 4. Inside the Bearclub, a lively bar and music venue with an international reach for artists and a national draw for audiences.

The Bear Club was recently voted one of the top 25 jazz clubs in the world, and is home to a program of events beyond jazz. Live music every week, a famed classical concert program, comedy and exhibitions have all helped place The Bear Club amongst some of the finest and in-demand independent venues in the country. Locally the club provides a unique drink offering and they are consistently rated the number one nightlife asset in Luton on TripAdvisor. Within the same building a creative co-working space has thrived for 8 years, incubating various creative, charity sector and tech start-ups. 2019 saw the return of the **Filmstock International Film Festival**, once a staple in the local arts offering. Filmstock ran from 2000-2009 and was one of the biggest independent film festivals in the UK. It screened hundreds of films from around the world, and boasted exclusive first time screenings of big movies alongside immersive events and themed screenings. Filmstock 12 is a special 10 year anniversary event, taking place in November 2019 across 4 days and 4 venues.

Departure Lounge is located in the Storefront gallery in the heart of the Hat District and working in partnership with the Culture Trust. Departure Lounge was originally set up in 2010 as a 'pop-up' gallery space with the aim of bringing the best in international contemporary art to Luton. With a photography specialism, we produce a rolling program of commissions, exhibitions and projects. We collaborate with the most promising emerging artists from all over the world, as well as working with Luton based artists with global ambitions. The innovative and ambitious character of our work has enabled us to secure funding to sustain our program from Arts Council England and other funders as well as coverage in the national press. Many of the artists we have worked with have gone on to establish highly successful careers after showing with Departure Lounge, underlining our experimental, risk-taking vision and Luton's potential as a promising place for the successful artists and creatives of tomorrow to start their careers



Image Shaun Armstrong

Fig 5. Hat Factory Arts Centre re-launch September 2019

Creative Industries at the University of Bedfordshire The creative industries sector contributes in excess of £90bn to the UK economy and in excess of 3m, people work in the wider creative economy. To meet this need, the University of Bedfordshire offers a stimulating range of foundation year, undergraduate and postgraduate courses that span the Arts, Media and Culture. We develop in our students the critical and collaborative skills required by graduates to succeed in this rapidly evolving sector as illustrated by the increasing use of digital technologies such as computer graphics and simulation. We nurture entrepreneurship and citizenship and focus on increasing graduate level employability. Clearview are just one successful company based in the hat district led by Bedfordshire alumni. Our outreach taster sessions stimulate interest in younger learners whilst as an access university we support lifelong learning across our communities bringing the creative arts into the local community through a vibrant program of events such as our Degree shows that fulfil our obligation to civic engagement and social enterprise. Since 2016, the University has delivered our Testbeds project, an exciting arts incubator that fosters skills development and knowledge exchange involving artists and creative practitioners. In this way, the University created a responsive model to develop arts & culture leadership in Luton. A critical focus of this effort has been based in the hat district.

“This Future-scape is an ambitious program of urban renewal and brings together a collective voice that represents a community of cultural and creative organisations who understand how a vibrant creative ecology would catalyse regional business development, heritage and sports to represent the broad multicultural identity of Luton and its regions. The creative ecology is the life blood of urban regeneration and renewal. People need to feel culturally connected, to belong, and to see the possibility of personal and professional development”

Hedley Roberts, Head of School Art and Design

04: A vision for the future-scape

The Hat District will offer a blend of immersive, essential and experiential culture. Our vision is for every space to burst with cultural vibrancy day and night in and around our shops, cafes, galleries, gardens, theatre, art-school, jazz bar, cinema, arts centers, studios, libraries and makerspaces. The Hat District will exude local pride, passion and grow skills. In turn we will promote the visitor economy, inward investment and supply an export market. Our contribution to the visitor economy, identity of place and local prosperity will be significant.

Our creative projects and places, our passion and our welcome will make the Hat District a destination of choice. We will collectively create a place for cultural knowledge, entertainment, inspiration and prosperity. Visitors and locals will flock to experience the changing offer presented at the Hat District through our events, launches and ethical festivals. Hat District users will ooze with excitement and absorb positive and creative energy as they experience the independent shops, arts centers, galleries, performances, bars, walks, café culture and restaurants serving locally grown and produced food.

Key is the mix of old and new with digital tech woven into the fabric of the District and our historic buildings brimming with pride. Our vision is for an eclectic but curated mix of cultural offerings, eras, approaches and materials that create colour, light and vibrancy with the utmost respect for heritage. This will boost our ability to succeed in City of Culture 2025, UNESCO creative city and city status.

We will work in partnership with commercial developers to ensure the new buildings around our Hat District brim are complementary. We ask that all developments have a cultural element – this could be in providing local facilities such as a new library and theatre or it could be a % of homes allocated as affordable housing to ‘cultural key workers’ – we are, after all the bread and butter of this community.

Our vision for the future is that the Hat District is a place where culture has a home, heritage is protected, creativity and entrepreneurship flourishes. Our small but very well curated Hat District could become a multi-billion pound flagship enterprise in its own right.

Our Vision is for the Hat District to become an eclectic but curated mix of cultural offerings, eras, approaches and materials that create colour, light and vibrancy with the utmost respect for heritage, and focus on local creative talent growth.

Our need is for the Hat District to be designated in order to (A) Protect the Cultural Core; (B) Attract and encourage complementary and high quality new developments only; and (C) Ensure all Hat District stakeholders and developers sign up to deliver shared Area Principles that address the vision.

“With a clear plan, informed by the future-scape vision, the Hat District could become a place where culture has a home, heritage is protected, creativity and entrepreneurship flourishes and where people love to be. If we can unite our approach we could create a sustainable model in Luton which would enable community access long in the future. Think of the talent, opportunities and brilliant cultural careers we could collectively enable”

Nick Gibson, Chair Culture Trust Luton

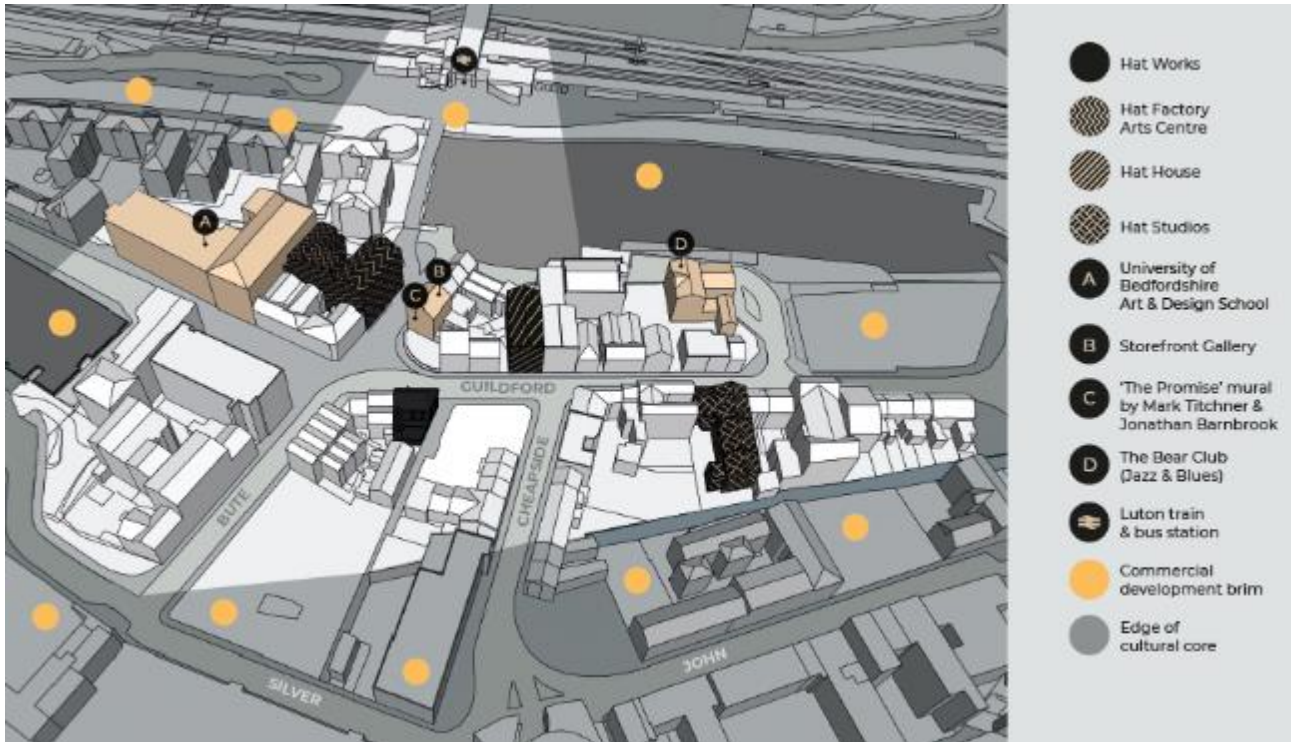


Image by THEM and the Culture Trust

Fig 6. Visualization of the Hat District cultural core (lighter shade) and potential development sites around the 'Hat Brim' (straw dots)

05: Designation

There is recognition that new developments will want to cluster around the Hat District energy center and we welcome gap sites being filled with world-class architecture that fit with our vision. Our vision requires the designation of two areas;

- **Cultural Core** prioritised for creativity, culture and protected heritage shown by the lighter grey shape above.
- **Commercial 'Hat brim'** around the cultural core for high quality complementary developments shown by straw dots.

“Getting the arts and culture offer right has the ability to transform Luton and most importantly the health and wellbeing of our residents, particularly those most disadvantaged. This Hat District vision could make Luton a fantastic and vibrant cultural destination enjoyed by residents and visitors and boosting our economy”.

Robin Porter, Chief Executive, Luton Borough Council

“Creative industries contribute significantly to making our towns the vibrant and interesting places people want to live and work. Luton is already recognized as a national hotspot for creating jobs in this sector. So, it’s important that we support a vision like this that will protect, promote and enhance high quality spaces and cultural activation. This is transformational”.

Hilary Chipping, Chief Executive, SEMLEP

06: Area Principles

We would like for the Hat District Cultural Core and Commercial Development Brim Stakeholders to sign up to the following principles;

- **Creativity:** The cultural core shall prioritize creative industries, entrepreneur, arts education, digital innovation and cultural venues. Anyone who lives in the district does so in the knowledge that it's a loud and proud place that is active 24/7 and unapologetic about the buzz it creates. The protection and recognition for cultural vibrancy and an environment that harnesses and supports creativity acts as a magnet to the creative businesses, entrepreneurs, innovators, students, investors and cultural explorers.
- **Heritage.** We will encourage care strategies for all the historic buildings and places of heritage importance in the cultural core, seek more designation and listing and insist on high quality repair and regeneration. We will encourage the development and adoption of design codes and public realm standards which reflect the heritage of Luton's hat making and industry buildings in the area. New functions within these buildings will bring creativity, making and manufacturing back into this once prosperous area.
- **Living:** We will seek a donation from all new residential development around the Brim to provide free or subsidized accommodation for artists and creative practitioners who are our Hat District key workers! We will manage this in Trust and into perpetuity to ensure creative industries and their whole workforce can live locally.
- **Industry:** The development of Hat Factories and buildings in the area into the best located and connected creative industry cluster in Europe. Led by the Culture Trust, Luton and building on the protection and redevelopment of heritage buildings this cluster shall grow from 25,000sqft in 2022 to 100,000sqft in 2030. We will promote augmented reality and a digital learning ethos.
- **Green:** Planting, trees, gardens and green space will be introduced to this space. Pedestrianisation that cover the whole of the Hat District so that the roads become safe spaces which are totally vehicle free. Recycling zone is placed to the perimeter for ethical disposal and deliveries are coordinated. Whilst we are global in trade, we are also ethically, as a district we offset 100% of our carbon footprint and make a positive contribution through our trees, plants and re-new able energy. We will open up the River Lea in order great an energy flow that connects us with the rest of the Town and further afield.

"The hat district today is a catalyst for benchmarking a new representation of the quality of creative, pioneering and innovative independent businesses, venues and organizations that are thriving in Luton. Giving them a home to be proud off and passionate about. Establishing a new bright beacon for the town that will have a transformative effect on retaining and attracting the very best people and opportunities into the town."

Alex Lawrence from Clearhead – the content creation agency based at Hat House Creative Studios



Image by Fabric Space

Fig 7. Visualization of the view from a new station exterior platform that navigates and invites ways in and around the town

07: Project Ideas

1. **Bute Gardens and amphitheater**— built over part of the existing Bute Street car park and providing green to this grey area we propose trees, grass, shade, play areas, discovery and beauty. The area will contains a Green-haus winter garden that grows fruit and vegetables year round used to feed our Hat District micro-biotic cafes and bars. Public art commissions and a decommissioned airline fuselage will create interest and connectivity to place. An amphitheater and equipped stage for co-produced outdoor events, happenings and screenings it could transform from a garden and venue into a terrace of water, play and performance fountains.
2. **Viewing Platform** – Celebrating the hat district heritage skyline and the distant view of the town center, Mall and Power Court, this new viewing platform will extend to the east of the station and shall act as a plinth from which to view Luton’s earthly delights. This promenade shall proudly connect High town with the District and will blend into the station re-design and include rooftop bars and night clubs that take in the views. The viewing platform will enable users to see the many options of things to do before them and clearly navigate their route into the heart of Luton along the runways to Power Court and the Town Centre or meander through the Hat District.

“Creating a clear route through from the station to the Mall is critically important to us in order to increase footfall to our retailers and connect the bus and train station with the rest of the town. I believe there is an opportunity here for Luton Town Centre to become a destination of choice. I am very supportive of this vision”.

Roy Greening, Manager of the Mall Shopping Centre, Luton

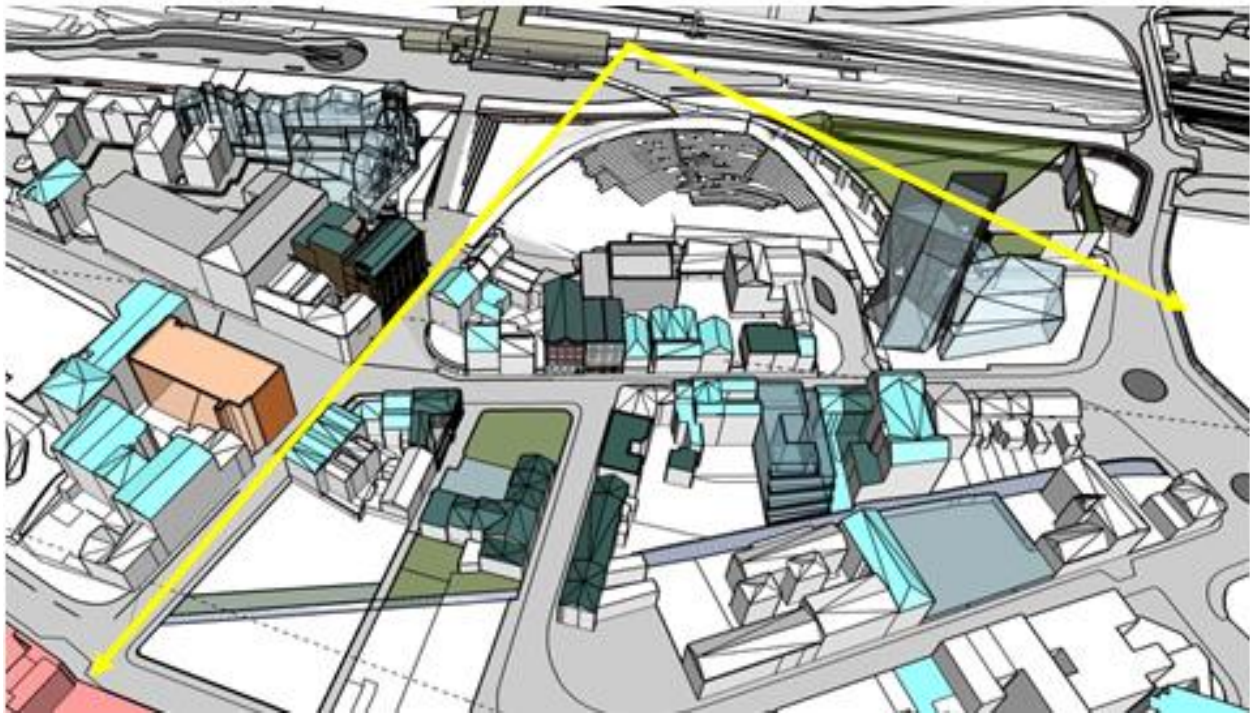


Image by THEM and Culture Trust

Fig 8. Visualization of the viewing lines from the Station down the runways to the Mall/shopping center and to Power Court

3. **The Runway** – We will retain the runway where 8000 commuters dash from train and bus to work, shops and offices down Bute Street. We will improve the sight-lines and create a clear run with no obstacles so that speedy travelers by foot can take-off! The Hat District, however offers a different pace and encourages people to linger and dwell. Runway 2 will be developed for football supporters and Power Court users to connect with the Hat District and experience the different style and districts types Luton has on offer. With clear visibility of the iconic stadium from the station, we will celebrate Luton old and new.

4. **Station** - We will strip back the additions to this sad-looking building and find the 1930s Hornby inside, celebrate its original intentions then expand and enhance its functionality by creating a new contemporary addition and accessible platforms. The station needs to bring and takes our commuters, residents, workers and visitors on a journey of celebration. The architecture needs to welcome everyone home, to work or to play as you arrive and give them an amazing and memorable send-off when they leave. Luton is a proud and plural town, has a coherent diverse community and an international airport – let our station celebrate the welcome everyone.

“A key aim of the council is ultimately about continuing to propel the town of Luton on its trajectory of becoming a place where residents are proud to live and visitors are eager to visit. Our ambition to expand the airport’s capacity; significant building projects in the centre of town and the council’s determination to have a modern railway station all have a part to play. We want others to see what we know to be the case: Luton is a culturally rich town, brimming with confidence in itself and in those who live and work here. Future plans around the Hat District will only serve to enhance Luton’s growing reputation as a home for innovative, diverse culture and arts.”

Cllr Sian Timoney, Deputy Leader, Luton Borough Council



Image by Fabric Space

Fig 9. Visualization of the ribbon mile weaving its way through the district

5. **Ribbon Mile-** The figure ‘8’ ribbon circular walk is an opulently designed high and low-rise walk that weaves walkers on an extraordinary and unconventional journey back to where you start. Promoting exercise, this circular mile will be designed to promote running, walking and is fully accessible for wheelchair users and buggies. Taking in the beauty of Luton's Hat district, opened up River Lea and the far-reaching hills the circular bridge takes you nowhere but moves you forwards spiritually and socially through the engaging viewpoints, gathering zones and rest areas

“Luton has seen considerable change over recent decades and the heritage of our town becomes even more important. The vision and aspiration for the Hat District is fundamental to embedding this sense of identity into the future prosperity of the town and enabling everyone to feel proud of their association with Luton. I am pleased to be able to add my voice and the collective voice of Luton businesses to support this important initiative.”

Gavin O’Brien, Chair of the Luton BID

6. **Hat District Creative Workspace** – a high quality refurbishment program (enabled by seed funding from South East Local Enterprise Partnership) to transform former hat factories and sites into useable cultural places that promote creativity, skills and bring jobs to the Hat District. Starting with the buildings most at risk and in need of investment, the Culture Trust shall bring about careful and strategic change that will support local skills and talent growth long into the future.

“We plan to curate a world-class collection of inspiring and affordable culture places and spaces here in the district. Building on our successful regeneration of two historic hat factories to date and our third on in progress, we are going to grow the factory ecology. As a charity we are committed to caring for and investing in the historic fabric of this area and will ensure that any funds generated from our factories are invested back into this vital creative community, this incredible place and our diverse cultural activity.”

Marie Kirbyshaw, Chief Executive of the Culture Trust, Luton.



Image by fabric space

Fig 10. Visualization of Guildford Street as viewed from the roundabout near Power Court

7. **Brim Developments** - New developments around the cultural core are welcomed. We will promote architecture and design competitions to attract world class teams who will understand our heritage, satisfy our green values and create buildings for our future. We will work with developers to create schemes that complement the cultural core, embrace the creative vibrancy of place and add positively to our Hat District creative community. Brim developments could also include one of our projects within their scheme such as a labyrinth library? Theatre? Curiosities Market? Night club? Independent Retail? Opening up the River Lea?

We are loud, proud and will be noisy 24/7 and so any residential developments will need to embrace culture on their doorstep and will hopefully get fully involved. Critically we ask that each residential development donate apartments for cultural key-workers to live in at subsidized accommodation or in some cases free homes for creative talent most in need of support. Collectively we want to promote a high quality of life, healthy environments and modern contemporary living options for residents.

“Luton is beginning what looks set to be a remarkable renaissance, with new energy, investment and optimism. The biggest risk now is that the town might give into the temptations of scattergun and random developments, not connected to an overall vision. A key lesson from other towns and cities around the world is that a shared vision which allows individual districts, like the Hat District, to grow a distinctive character and appeal, pays off hugely in the long-run in terms of prosperity.”

Geoff Mulgan, Chief Executive of National Endowment for Science, Technology & the Arts (NESTA)

8. **Labyrinth**- a space for adventure in literacy, learning, reading, making and performing stories, searching for answers and seeking surprise. A multi-media platform that ranges from books to augmented reality this space specifically engages young people together with families and promotes in exploration, interaction and curiosity.

“We could design an environment which is a cross between a circus and an immersive art Installation! Kids love it, parents do too as we encourage family play and learning together in a cross-cultural way”

Karen Perkins. Director of Cultural Engagement, Culture Trust, Luton.

9. **Open Studios:** We plan to peel the facades of less significant buildings in the district creating a mix of compartments, balconies, studios, temporary exhibition platforms and a fascinating and ever changing range of alcoves, displays and shop windows to enrich the experience of passersby. Open studios will be a space for artists, exhibitions, installations and creative happenings. This could be a solution for the Job Centre building, station or 'eyesores' across the district. Exploiting Luton's growing reputation as a cultural destination, Departure Lounge (active in Luton since 2010) will develop its national and international profile as a contemporary photography gallery, offering a unique program of exhibitions, commissions, participatory and educational work as well as genuine opportunities for the people of the town to undertake paid training for a career in galleries, museums and contemporary art.

"Exploiting Luton's growing reputation as a cultural destination, we (Departure Lounge, active in Luton since 2010) will develop its national and international profile as a contemporary photography gallery, offering a program of exhibitions, commissions, participatory and educational work as well as opportunities for local people to undertake paid training for a career in galleries, museums and contemporary art".

Matthew Shaul, Director of the Storefront and Departure Lounge Gallery, Hat District.

10. **War-tunnels:** An epic history and heritage project, opening up the vast network of underground war bunker tunnels under High Town and starting in the Hat District. Possible partnership opportunity with Imperial War Museum, who have found similar success underground with Churchill War Rooms, with this representing 'the people's' experience as a curatorial contrast.

"Part educational tour, part immersive theatrical experience of sounds, smells and visuals. An education center above ground will handle the practicalities, but below, the 'underground experience' will compare to the likes of Edinburgh's booming under-street attractions."

Justin Doherty – Filmmaker, proprietor of *The Bear Club* and heritage property owner



Image by Thomas Young

Fig 11. *Hat Pin* by Tom Pearman, on the rear elevation of Hat House creative workspace

08: Next-Steps

This is a Hat District creative community led paper, but we recognize that in order to fully realize the potential of the Hat District Future-scape it will be important to grow a coalition of partners, especially the Council, SEMLEP, Historic England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, developers, innovators, educators and cultural entrepreneurs.

We hope that this coalition or partners will consider this creative community led paper, the vision, needs and proposed area principles in order that it could inform policy and planning going forwards.

Our ambition is for the Hat District future-scape to be recognized and reflected locally, nationally and internationally in;

- The Luton Town Centre Development Framework
- Plaiters Lea Conservation Maintenance and Management Plan
- Local planning policy and S106 agreements
- Local and Regional Cultural Strategy
- National and international Arts and Cultural Regeneration, Architecture and Urban design best practice.

09: Co-authors

This Hat District creative community led paper was co-authored by a group of cultural venue and creative space owners, directors and curators, architects and artists based in the Hat District. We are a hand-few of the many pioneers of change for the Hat District and recognise that we following a rich and talented legacy of early adopters who brought about cultural change in this area over recent decades. We are looking forward and we are committed to strengthening and growing the cultural presence in the District from today onwards.

We are;

Justin Doherty - Filmmaker, proprietor of The Bear Club and heritage property owner

Nick Gibson - Independent Artisan trader/producer, Chair of the Culture Trust.

Marie Kirbyshaw – Creative and Capital project Director of Hat District & Chief Exec’ of the Culture Trust

Geoff Mulgan - Cultural planner, local resident, Chief Exec of NESTA, Trustee of the Culture Trust

Anita Nadkarni - Architect and Urban designer, Hat Factory refurb architect.

Hedley Roberts - Artist and Head of Art School, University of Bedfordshire

Matthew Shaul - Gallery curator, Departure Lounge and Storefront Gallery curator

With thanks also for creative discussions about this project with:

Hillary Chipping from South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP)

Ian Ferguson, Fergus McLardy from the Luton Business Improvement District (BID)

Roy Greening from the Mall shopping Centre

Gavin O’Brien and Alex Lawrence from Clearhead Media, based at Hat House, Hat District.

Robin Porter, Cllr Hazel Simmons, Cllr Sian Timoney, Laura Church, Sinead McNamara, Michaela Nutt, Georgina Barker,

Rizwana Zaman, and Toby Maloy from Luton Borough Council.

Bill Rammell, Jan Domin, Emma Gill and Carlota Larrea from University of Bedfordshire

Nick Serota, Hedley Swain, Sue Hughes, Amy Vaughan, Claudia West from the Arts Council England.

Lord Dennis Stevenson and Heneage Stevenson for telling us we should write our vision and project ideas down!

Mark Titchner, Artist and lead artist for the ‘As You Change, So Do I’ Hat District public realm arts project

We welcome many more discussions.

We hope you will reference this paper and in doing so acknowledge creative sources and ownership. All images used are for illustrative purposes only. For high resolutions versions of these image please contact the hatdistrict@lutonculture.com

