

23/7/2025

**The Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP**

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**Norfolk and Suffolk – Creative Industries Cluster**

**Enhancing the regional economy and furthering the Government's growth mission**

Dear Madam Secretary,

In alignment with the Government's recently published Modern Industrial Strategy (MIS) and sector plan for Creative Industries, the Norfolk and Suffolk Local Growth Plans seek to foster innovation, enhance access to finance and develop clusters. These plans are oriented towards creating an environment that is conducive to investment which, therefore, can contribute towards the MIS's aspiration of raising sectoral business investment to £31 billion by 2035. The impactful Create Growth Programme (East Anglia), delivered and managed within the region, has already been successful in catalysing investment into our businesses, and we are determined to build on this progress. The imminent prospect of devolution offers an additional opportunity to direct further investment into the sector.

The Norfolk and Suffolk Local Growth Plans showcase the importance and vitality of key sectors, including the Creative Industries and Cultural sectors. As both counties are steeped in culture, Norwich was England's first UNESCO City of Literature and Suffolk is home to the landmark Sutton Hoo archaeological site, it is unsurprising that both counties are such fertile ground for these sectors. Both Growth Plans recognise the importance of the sectors in enabling growth in not only the Digital Tech, Film and TV and Games industries, but also its impact on the wider economy.

Given both counties' strengths and the emphasis given to the sectors in recent strategic documents and initiatives, the omission of Norfolk and Suffolk as a nationally significant Creative Industries cluster was met with a certain degree of bewilderment and consternation. Norfolk and Suffolk's activity has a significant regional impact which, in many respects, equates to those areas prioritised in the MIS, namely city regions.

The MIS references a desire to build a 'fairer country' and to 'spread prosperity to all parts of the country'. Redressing the bias for city regions is essential for ensuring that economic growth is dispersed, including in areas that, with support, have high growth potential, and not just concentrated in certain pockets of the country. Ultimately, a fairer and more prosperous country can only be attained through an inclusive vision for economic growth. This vision should incorporate clusters such as Norfolk and Suffolk's Creative Industries cluster.

Across both counties, there is a wealth of Creative Industries assets. These assets, often found at our pioneering educational institutions, will catalyse inward investment, be invaluable for developing skills and are partly responsible for the dramatic increase in sectoral employment levels in the region that is almost treble the national growth levels. Norwich University of the Arts possesses a pioneering Immersive Visualisation and Simulation Lab and, in collaboration with Sony, has launched a virtual production studio. It has also created an Institute for Creative Technologies that will ensure that the benefits deriving from Creative Industries can be applied across disciplines, including in priority areas such as environmental science and health innovation.

The University of Suffolk's DigiTech Centre and Digital Futures Institute will be significant centres for applied research and technological innovation. The XR Lab at the University and Professional Development Centre at West Suffolk College is revolutionising education by developing immersive content to create transformative learning experiences. The assets at the lab, including a virtual production suite, spatial lab, XR theatre and R&D Lab, also play an active role in developing industry partnerships that deliver innovative solutions through virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality and AI.

The Create Growth Programme, with the University of East Anglia performing the role of delivery partner, has delivered four investment readiness cohorts to 73 companies with a further two cohorts scheduled. Additionally, over £560,000 has been secured for Creative Industries businesses in Norfolk and Suffolk through previous Innovate UK Create Growth competitions.

Our assets also contribute to our strengths in each of the subsectors identified in the MIS. A recent report from Brandland found that Norwich has a thriving advertising and marketing industry with employment levels outstripping those nationally. Both counties, boosted by enviable and diverse landscapes, have flourishing filming industries, as exemplified by the burgeoning BAFTA and BIFTA accredited Norwich

Film Festival that has become internationally renowned. Educational institutions such as Norwich University of the Arts, the University of East Anglia and the University of Suffolk produce highly skilled graduates in music, performance and the visual arts. Suffolk is also home to Latitude Festival which is famed for its showcasing of a diverse range of arts.

Gaming, another subsector identified in the MIS, is also a notable strength for both counties. A Games East report found that East Anglia has the potential, with its leading research and development hubs, to become a major gaming cluster. Both Norwich University of the Arts and the University of Suffolk deliver TIGA-accredited games courses that generate copious talent. Increasingly, students from these courses are opting to remain in Norfolk and Suffolk and the region is attracting exciting businesses, including indie games studios from London and elsewhere.

These encouraging developments are underpinned by effective local networks, such as Game Anglia, and the support afforded through enterprising programmes, including Create Growth and the Future Tech Programme, that support early-stage founders to generate investment and secure innovation grant funding. Moreover, Connected Innovation, a leading innovation programme, has enabled, via business delegations, sixteen games and immersive tech companies to reach national and international audiences and showcase this cluster to investors and publishers.

Cultural activity, often acting as a stimulus to Creative Industries and vice versa, is also an important element of both counties economies. The Norfolk and Suffolk Culture Board (NSCB) has established itself as an authoritative regional and national sector voice that is regarded by Arts Council England as an exemplar of regional sectoral collaboration. NSCB has published two strategies since its formation in 2012 – Culture Drives Growth (2015) and Culture Drives Impact (2022) – and has proven its effectiveness by attracting approximately £2m of smart and impactful direct investment for major programmes of growth and change. These programmes have had a demonstrable impact on growing the regional economy, driving higher levels of cultural tourism and supporting talent development in the cultural sector. The NSCB's representatives from senior posts in higher education also assist the board in utilising its strategic influence to develop talent and skills across all levels of education.

The prospect of devolution could enable the NSCB to expand its strategic ambition and provide further support to the Norfolk and Suffolk economies through programmes in areas such as Environmental Sustainability and Creative Health. Subject to investment, the latter programme will lead to the creation of an 'Enabling Creative Health Plan', benefitting health partners in Norfolk & Suffolk, which would include a trailblazing new Creative Health Apprenticeship

Our existing arts and heritage activity and cultural assets entice significant visitor numbers. The Local Visitor Economy Partnership, a status conferred on both counties by Visit England in 2024, works strategically, including with the NSCB, to

maximise economic opportunities emanating from cultural tourism that often generates significantly higher spending, some studies showing by 266%, than other forms of tourism.

Cultural tourism offers also have significant potential for further growth and there have been demonstrable recent successes that have driven wider economic prosperity. For example, Lowestoft's First Light festival, an inclusive, multi-arts and science festival, has been a catalyst for cultural regeneration in the area since 2019. The 900-year-old Norwich Castle has undergone a £28m refurbishment. Due to reopen this summer, it features 900 medieval objects in its brand-new Gallery of Medieval Life, a unique regional partnership with the British Museum aimed at driving a significant increase in visitor numbers.

Elsewhere, bold commitments have been made to the future development of cultural assets for the strategic benefit of the wider economy. In Great Yarmouth, the restoration of the Winter Gardens, the UK's last Victorian ironwork glasshouse that is located on a seaside promenade, will create a nationally unique visitor attraction and accelerate regeneration in that area of the town. In King's Lynn, St George's Guildhall, the UK's oldest working theatre and the only one remaining that can credibly claim to have hosted William Shakespeare, will become a major new cultural destination in the town. In Suffolk, Sizewell C represents an incredible local economic opportunity but has major perception challenges. Through projects like Sizewell Creative, the Culture sector is playing a vital supporting role in addressing these perception challenges.

So that both counties can fulfil their roles, and potential, in the government's growth mission for the sector, we would appreciate clarity on why Norfolk and Suffolk were overlooked as a Creative Industries cluster and, despite this omission, how we can play leading roles in the government's ambitious plans for the sector. A meeting to discuss these issues would be most welcome.

We look forward to working with the government to further bolster our already highly successful Creative and Cultural Industries. These sectors not only have transformational local impacts but enrich the United Kingdom's overall offering and can contribute to entrenching the country as a 'globally creative superpower'.

Yours sincerely,



Louise Jordan-Hall

**Chair of the Norfolk & Suffolk Culture Board**



Nick Steven Jones

**Chair of the Norfolk Business Board**



Mark Pendlington

**Chair of the Suffolk Business Board**