



# **Bridport Workspace and Business Needs Assessment**

## **Final Report**

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Bridport  
Town Council

## Executive Summary

This report combines findings from six qualitative interviews with workspace operators, survey responses from 20+ businesses in the Bridport Local Area Partnership (BLAP) area, and feedback from 15+ individuals who attended the group workshop. It identifies high demand for flexible, affordable workspaces, challenges with infrastructure, limited recruitment of younger employees, and sustainability concerns.

While Bridport's identity as a tourist destination *and* a hub for creativity and small businesses is a strength, limited flexible workspace options, ageing infrastructure, and fragmented routes to work support hinder growth.

By addressing these key barriers, Bridport can strengthen its role as a hub for small businesses, creative industries, and tourism. Investments in energy-efficient retrofits, live-work units, and mixed-use hubs will drive sustainability while supporting business growth. Enhancing workforce opportunities for young professionals and improving infrastructure will help retain and attract essential talent.

**Achieving these goals requires dedicated collaboration between local councils, businesses, local schools, and the community.** By prioritising collaboration and a shared set of goals alongside the shared values of adaptability, affordability, and sustainability, Bridport will create a competitive and inclusive business environment, ensuring long-term prosperity for the area.

The proposed projects and actions arising from the research are outlined here and explored in detail within the report:

- Establish a local **workspace property partnership** to unlock access to commercial property, map actual capacity needs, track and promote available workspaces, fundraise, and more.
- Support **co-working hubs** and **live-work spaces**, prioritise **short-term, flexible leases** for start-ups, and secure funding to enable **grants or incentives for retrofitting** old buildings into affordable workspaces.
- Launch a **decarbonisation support programme** for local businesses.
- Convene a group of contractors and suppliers who can specialise in **retrofitting buildings for modern use**.
- **Support young entrepreneurs** with affordable live-work solutions, training and apprenticeships.
- **Strengthen collaboration** between councils, businesses, and educational institutions.

A draft of this report and summary of recommendations was presented to the Joint Councils Committee on 27 February 2025 to inform a review of and amendments to the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan.

The Summary of Recommendations in Section 6 of this report are specific to the Neighbourhood Plan review, and are written to ensure updates to the Plan and related project proposals will address the key challenges raised by this report, and support a thriving business community in Bridport.

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## 1. Introduction & Methodology

This report combines insights from qualitative interviews with workspace operators in Bridport and survey responses from local businesses. The aim is to identify trends, issues, and recommendations for addressing workspace needs in the BLAP area.

- **Qualitative Interviews:** Six detailed interviews with workspace operators provided insights into workspace trends, challenges, and opportunities. Interviews included operators of Bridport Market, Pineapple Business Park, St Michael's and Dreadnought trading estates, Bridmet, and a representative of Symonds & Sampson commercial agents [Appendix 1].
- **Survey Responses:** Data was collected from 20+ businesses in Bridport, addressing workspace needs, infrastructure, sustainability, and workforce recruitment. [Appendix 2]
- **Survey Respondents insights:**
  - Survey respondents represented sectors like retail, professional services, hospitality, trades, and manufacturing capturing the variety of businesses that operate in the area.
  - Almost half of respondents work from the town centre, where a further  $\frac{1}{3}$  of respondents worked from home/remotely.
  - The majority of respondents were from 'established' businesses, operating for at least 5 years (77%), and many over 10 years (63%).

The number of respondents is comparatively small and may not represent the views of a larger number of people. For this reason we hosted a workshop to review the findings of the initial survey and interviews, and invited input on developing the recommendations of this report.

- **Workshop Feedback:** 15+ individuals from the Bridport community attended the workshop, and were presented with the survey findings. Their initial impressions were discussed as a whole, and then they worked in smaller groups to come up with tangible actions or proposals for the best use of the information collected.

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## 2. Key Findings

### 2.1 Demand for Flexible and Affordable Workspaces

77% of respondents said there is a lack of workspace availability in the area (see [Graph A](#)). Both the interviews and survey responses, and feedback from workshop participants,

highlight a significant need for flexible and affordable workspaces tailored to smaller businesses, startups, and creative industries. Many businesses expressed a desire for shared spaces, hot desks, or hybrid facilities suitable for collaborative or independent work.

The lack of flexible, reasonably priced workspaces is seen as a barrier to business growth and diversification.

Operators and respondents emphasised the importance of retaining Bridport's identity as a hub for independent, creative businesses. Unique community-focused spaces are seen as essential to attracting and retaining businesses.

**Flexible workspaces** are characterised by their adaptability to meet the diverse needs of businesses, particularly startups, small enterprises, and creative industries. Key features in demand include:

- **Short-Term Leases:** Many businesses require the flexibility to scale up or down without being tied to long-term contracts.
- **Shared and Collaborative Spaces:** Shared workspaces, such as co-working hubs, are increasingly sought after by freelancers, independent professionals, and small creative teams.
- **Hybrid Usage:** Spaces that can accommodate multiple functions, such as workshops that double as retail spaces or offices with creative production areas, are highly desirable.

**Affordable workspaces** are essential for supporting Bridport's thriving community of independent businesses, especially in industries such as retail, professional services, arts, and manufacturing. Key drivers of this demand include:

- **Cost Sensitivity of Small Businesses:** Many businesses operate on thin margins and cannot afford increasingly high rents or significant utility costs.
- **Startup Growth and Survival:** Startups and younger entrepreneurs, often working in creative sectors, require affordable premises to establish their operations without high overhead costs.
- **Scaling Barriers:** Businesses that grow beyond home offices or small setups often find it hard to move into larger premises due to high costs.

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### 2.1.1 Supporting Insights from Interviews

#### **Pineapple Business Park:**

- Pineapple has adapted to the evolving needs of tenants by offering spaces that can be customised and scaled as businesses grow. This includes creating new units or allowing tenants to alter existing spaces.

**Bridport Market:**

- The market manager reported a shift away from traditional traders toward multi-channel sellers who use the market as a “shop window.” These businesses require affordable, flexible spaces to operate on an occasional or seasonal basis.
  - Seasonal traders often depend on affordable, short-term spaces like those available at the market. However, such spaces are limited in their capacity to support long-term business growth.
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2.1.2 Highlight Data from Survey Responses

Survey respondents frequently cited the need for:

- **More flexible use of spaces:** 63% of respondents said their current premises do not meet their business needs. Of these, two-thirds said they’re looking for more flexible use of space.
- **Smaller Units:** 40% of businesses highlighted the need for smaller, affordable spaces suited to their operational scale.
- **Flexible Terms:** Many expressed frustration with rigid lease terms, noting a preference for licenses to occupy or short-term lease arrangements.
- **Creative Hubs:** Independent creatives and small-scale manufacturers pointed to the lack of spaces tailored to artistic production or collaborative work.

**Example:**

One respondent mentioned working from home but expressed a need for a flexible shared space that supports independent creatives and freelancers. They also highlighted the lack of a centralised hub for shared tools like 3D printers.

The need for affordable workspaces was a recurring theme among respondents:

- **Rising Rents:** 50% of survey respondents indicated rent affordability as a top concern.
- **Utility Costs:** Many businesses face disproportionately high utility costs in older or poorly insulated premises.
- **Missed Opportunities:** Businesses unable to find affordable workspaces often remain home-based, limiting their ability to scale.

**Example:**

One respondent noted that they had been searching for a budget-friendly workshop for over a year but could only find outdated industrial spaces or large units far beyond their needs and budget.

[See Graph B](#)

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### 2.1.3 Challenges Limiting Flexible and Affordable Workspace Development

**Lack of Supply:**

- Operators and respondents consistently highlighted a shortage of affordable, small-to-medium units in Bridport.
- Larger, more expensive spaces dominate the commercial real estate market, leaving little for small businesses to choose from.

**Infrastructure Issues:**

- Flexible workspaces require strong utilities and internet connectivity, both of which are often lacking in older buildings and rural settings.

**Affordability:**

- Rising rents and utility costs make it difficult for small businesses and startups to secure appropriate spaces.
- High utility bills, driven by outdated heating systems and poor insulation, make otherwise affordable spaces less viable for cost-conscious businesses.

**Rigid Lease Terms:**

- Some landlords prioritise long-term, high-rent leases, which excludes small businesses looking for affordable, short-term solutions.

**Planning Restrictions:**

- Many older buildings, particularly above high-street shops, could be repurposed for flexible workspaces, but planning restrictions and regulatory hurdles delay or prevent these conversions.
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#### 2.1.4 Impact of Affordability Challenges

- **Stalled Business Growth:**
    - Several respondents noted that high costs prevented them from moving to better-equipped premises, even when their current space was inadequate.
  - **Reduced Diversity:**
    - Affordability challenges may limit Bridport's ability to attract a diverse range of businesses, particularly in creative and emerging industries.
  - **Impact on Young Entrepreneurs:**
    - Younger business owners or freelancers struggle disproportionately with workspace costs, as they often lack the financial stability to commit to expensive leases.
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#### 2.1.5 Recommendations to Meet Demand

##### **Policy and Development Support:**

- Streamline planning regulations to allow the conversion of underutilised buildings into flexible workspaces.
- Provide subsidies or incentives for developers to create co-working hubs or shared facilities in central locations.
- Introduce initiatives to subsidise rent for small businesses and startups in their initial years, focusing on high-demand sectors like arts and manufacturing.
- Offer grants for retrofitting older buildings with energy-efficient systems to reduce utility costs for tenants.

##### **Dedicated Flexible Workspace Projects:**

- Invest in mixed-use hubs that offer small workshops, shared desks, and meeting rooms with pay-as-you-use models. This could cater to seasonal traders, remote workers, and creative industries.
- Incentivise mixed-use developments to incorporate affordable commercial spaces alongside residential units.
- Encourage landlords to create smaller, subdivided units to accommodate businesses needing affordable spaces. This could include shared workshops or production spaces.



**Local Promotion:**

- Create a centralised platform to connect businesses with flexible workspace options and allow smaller operators to advertise short-term leases or available units.
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**2.2 Challenges with Utilities and Infrastructure**

Utility quality and availability, particularly heating, insulation, and energy efficiency, are recurring concerns. Businesses operating in older or repurposed buildings often face disproportionately high utility costs.

These issues disproportionately impact small businesses, creative industries, and tourism operators, limiting their ability to thrive.

Accessibility challenges, including inadequate parking for employees and customers, are common across both town-centre and industrial estate businesses.

A growing focus on sustainability is evident, with some businesses implementing measures like renewable energy, LED lighting, and retrofitting. However, many businesses have not received sufficient support to, or cannot afford to, adopt sustainable practices.

The nature of challenges with utilities and infrastructure include:

- **High Energy Costs:**
  - Rising energy costs, particularly in older buildings, were highlighted as a major issue. Poor insulation, outdated heating systems, and inefficient lighting contribute to high operational expenses.
- **Lack of Energy Efficiency:**
  - Many workspaces, particularly in older or industrial units, are not equipped with energy-efficient technologies, making them unsuitable for modern businesses.
- **Parking Limitations:**
  - Limited parking for employees and customers is a recurring issue, particularly in the town center and high streets.
- **Transport and Accessibility:**
  - Poor public transport connectivity makes some workspaces difficult for employees and customers to access, particularly those in outlying areas.
- **Aging Buildings:**
  - A significant proportion of workspaces are located in older buildings, many of which require substantial upgrades to meet modern business needs.

### 2.2.1 Supporting Insights from Interviews

#### **Symonds & Sampson:**

- Operators noted that aging commercial properties in Bridport often have poor energy efficiency and high maintenance costs, making them less appealing for small businesses. Retrofitting these buildings is essential but costly.

#### **Bridport Market:**

- Seasonal traders at the market expressed frustration with limited infrastructure such as lack of sheltered stalls, poor utility connections, and insufficient customer parking

#### **Pineapple Business Park:**

- Pineapple has invested in infrastructure improvements, including renewable energy installations and better internet connectivity, to attract tenants. However, not all workspaces in the area have followed this lead, leaving some businesses with suboptimal facilities.

#### **Dreadnought Estate:**

- While tenants are not allowed to adapt their units to make them more sustainable themselves, investment into decarbonisation on the estate is on the back burner for the new owner at the moment, due to infrastructure costs and the physical state of the old buildings.
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### 2.2.2 Data from Survey Responses

- **Utility Costs:**
  - 30% of survey respondents identified high utility costs as a significant challenge, citing inefficient heating and lighting as primary contributors.

#### **Example:**

One survey respondent operating in a rural industrial park noted that inconsistent internet connectivity and high energy costs made their workspace less viable compared to urban alternatives.

- **Parking:**
  - 25% of respondents reported inadequate parking as a barrier for employees and customers.

- **Accessibility:**
  - 20% of businesses, particularly those in outlying areas, highlighted poor transport links as a limiting factor for both employee recruitment and customer access.
- **Sustainability and decarbonisation:**
  - Some businesses implement renewable energy measures, but financial barriers limit wider adoption.

See [Graph C](#) & [Graph D](#)

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### 2.2.3 Broader Impacts of Utilities and Infrastructure Challenges

- High utility bills reduce profitability for small businesses and limit their ability to invest in growth.
  - Landlords are often unwilling to invest in infrastructure upgrades, leaving tenants to bear the brunt of inefficiencies.
  - Poor transport links and parking shortages deter potential employees, compounding recruitment difficulties already faced by many businesses.
  - Tourism and leisure businesses that rely on customer footfall are particularly affected by infrastructure limitations like parking and accessibility.
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### 2.2.4 Recommendations for Addressing Utilities and Infrastructure Challenges

- **Renewable Energy Initiatives & Incentives:**
  - Encourage the adoption of renewable energy installations, such as solar panels, to reduce long-term energy costs.
  - Introduce financial incentives for tenants to invest in minor infrastructure improvements, such as lighting or basic insulation.
  - Provide grants or subsidies for landlords and tenants to upgrade heating systems, insulation, and lighting in older buildings.
- **Regulatory Support:**
  - Streamline planning permissions for retrofitting older workspaces to make it easier for landlords to undertake upgrades.

- **Centralised Parking Solutions:**
    - Develop shared parking hubs near town centers and industrial estates to accommodate both employees and customers.
  - **Enhance Public Transport:**
    - Invest in improved public transport connectivity to rural and industrial areas to support workforce mobility.
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## 2.3 Recruitment and Workforce Development

Recruitment and workforce development emerged as key challenges for businesses in Bridport, particularly regarding the availability of skilled workers and engagement with younger demographics (under 30).

- Businesses in sectors such as construction, hospitality, and creative industries report gaps in both technical and soft skills among potential employees.
  - Businesses report low representation of employees under the age of 30, with only 10% of survey respondents indicating that younger workers make up a significant portion of their workforce.
  - This is partly attributed to a lack of affordable housing and workspace options, as well as limited opportunities for young people to train and develop locally.
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### 2.3.1 Insights from Interviews

#### **Symonds & Sampson:**

- Operators noted that younger people are often drawn to larger cities for career opportunities, leaving local businesses with a smaller talent pool. Bridport's workspace and housing affordability issues further exacerbate this trend.

#### **Bridport Market:**

- The market serves as an entry point for small-scale entrepreneurs but lacks formal pathways to support long-term growth and workforce development for traders.

#### **Bridmet:**

- Said that while its own apprenticeship scheme is a good example of a local route to work, a lack of collaboration between local schools, businesses, and councils more generally limits the pipeline of trained workers entering local industries overall.
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### 2.3.2 Highlight Data from Survey Responses

- **Age Representation:**
  - 90% of respondents indicated they have no employees under 30 years old, indicating a significant demographic gap.
- **Recruitment Challenges:**
  - 50% of businesses reported difficulties in finding qualified candidates, particularly in specialised fields such as manufacturing, arts, and hospitality.
- **Skills Development:**
  - Fewer than 20% of businesses have accessed grants or support for employee training, suggesting limited engagement with external workforce development initiatives.

#### **Example:**

One respondent in the catering sector noted that while they regularly recruit university students for seasonal roles, they lack access to local training programmes for more specialised staff such as chefs or event coordinators.

See [Graph E](#)

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### 2.3.3 Broader Impacts of recruitment challenges

- Recruitment challenges limit business growth, particularly in sectors like hospitality, tourism, and creative industries that are essential to Bridport's economy.
  - The lack of affordable housing and suitable workspaces prevents young professionals from establishing themselves locally, contributing to the talent drain.
  - Without formal workforce development programmes, businesses miss opportunities to train and retain staff, particularly in specialised or technical roles.
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### 2.3.4 Recommendations for Recruitment and Workforce Development

#### 2.3.4a Local Training programmes

- **Skill Development Hubs:**
  - Establish a Bridport Skills Hub to provide training in key sectors such as hospitality, arts, construction, and tourism.

- Collaborate with local schools and colleges to offer apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities.
- **Industry-Specific Training:**
  - Partner with trade associations to create sector-specific certification programmes, such as food hygiene for catering staff or artistic techniques for creative businesses.

#### 2.3.4b Youth Engagement and Retention

- **Affordable Housing and Workspaces:**
  - Develop live-work units and affordable housing solutions to attract and retain younger professionals.
- **Mentorship and Entrepreneurship programmes:**
  - Create initiatives to support young entrepreneurs, including networking events, business grants, and mentorship schemes led by local business leaders.

#### 2.3.4c Collaborative Recruitment Efforts

- **Shared Recruitment Platforms:**
  - Develop a centralised job board to connect local businesses with potential employees, particularly for seasonal and part-time roles, and apprenticeships.
- **Recruitment Partnerships:**
  - Encourage partnerships between Bridport businesses and nearby universities or trade schools to attract new graduates and trainees.

#### 2.3.4d Access to Funding and Grants

- **Training Grants:**
    - Provide funding to businesses for in-house or external employee training, particularly in specialised areas such as construction, hospitality, or creative industries.
  - **Subsidised Employment Initiatives:**
    - Launch programmes that subsidise wages for apprentices or entry-level positions, encouraging businesses to take on younger employees.
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## 2.4 Workspace and Housing

The interplay between workspace and housing in Bridport is crucial, with unused spaces above shops and demand for live-work units presenting opportunities to support businesses and address housing shortages. Some respondents touched on workspace linked to housing or live-work arrangements.

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### 2.4.1 Unused Space Above Shops

- Multiple respondents noted that there is significant unused space above shops in Bridport that could potentially be converted into live-work units or residential accommodations.
  - These spaces, currently left unused for planning or logistical reasons, were highlighted as an untapped resource that could support small businesses and alleviate workspace shortages.
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### 2.4.2 Demand for Integrated Live-Work Units

- Some businesses, particularly in the creative and startup sectors, expressed a need for integrated live-work spaces that reduce operational costs while offering flexibility.
  - Respondents working from home or in rural areas mentioned the appeal of workspaces that combine residential and professional uses, especially for those in media, arts, and small-scale manufacturing.
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### 2.4.3 Housing as a Barrier to Workspace Usage

- The lack of affordable housing in Bridport indirectly affects workspace usage. Businesses noted that younger employees and entrepreneurs struggle to afford housing, limiting their ability to work locally or start businesses in the area.
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### 2.4.4 Converting Office or Retail Spaces

- Operators like Symonds & Sampson suggested that underused office spaces in town centers should be converted into residential units or live-work spaces to better align with modern needs.
- This aligns with broader trends of hybrid use spaces that combine residential and professional functions.

**Example:**

One independent business owner suggested that the unused space above shops in the town centre adds to both the housing shortage and the lack of usable workspace for independent workers, who end up working on laptops from cafés.

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#### 2.4.5 Regulatory Challenges

- Planning restrictions were cited as a significant barrier to converting commercial properties (e.g., offices above shops) into live-work units. Streamlining these regulations was suggested as a way to expand workspace availability.
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#### 2.4.6 Recommendations

- Introduce policies or incentives for converting unused commercial properties into live-work spaces, focusing on flexibility for small businesses and creatives.
  - Promote mixed-use developments that incorporate affordable housing alongside workspaces, ensuring both are accessible to younger demographics.
  - Develop initiatives to combine workspace and housing affordability programmes, encouraging younger professionals to live and work in Bridport.
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### 2.5 The Unique Needs of Tourism and Leisure Businesses

Tourism and leisure businesses in Bridport are diverse, including hotels, catering services, holiday parks, and leisure centres, as well as market traders. Their workspace requirements are shaped by:

- **Customer Interaction:** Spaces need to support customer-facing activities, such as retail showrooms, ticket counters, or event hosting.
  - **Seasonality:** Many tourism businesses operate seasonally, requiring short-term or flexible leases to align with peak tourist seasons.
  - **Storage and Accessibility:** Adequate storage for equipment and stock (e.g., event materials, catering tools) and accessibility for large customer volumes are essential.
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#### 2.5.2 Supporting Insights from Interviews



**Bridport Market:**

- The market serves as a significant attraction for tourists, particularly during summer. Market stalls provide seasonal traders with flexible, affordable spaces to showcase local goods.
- Seasonal operators noted that expanding workspace offerings for short-term or pop-up activities could enhance Bridport's appeal to tourists and local leisure seekers.

**Symonds & Sampson:**

- Tourism-related businesses in Bridport, such as holiday lets and recreational facilities, rely on nearby light industrial spaces for maintenance and storage. However, these spaces are often limited in availability.

**Pineapple:**

- One operator noted the need for additional workspace to support onsite services, such as catering facilities, equipment storage, and guest services. Limited workspace availability and planning delays hinder their ability to expand these services.

**2.5.3 Data from Survey Responses**

- **Storage and Event Spaces:** Several respondents noted the need for spaces that can be adapted for events, leisure activities, or storage during off-seasons.
- **Customer-Facing Accessibility:** Tourism businesses emphasised the importance of central, high-traffic locations that are easy for tourists to access.
- **Seasonal Flexibility:** Tourism businesses reported a preference for workspace leases that align with peak travel periods.

**2.5.4 Challenges for Tourism and Leisure Businesses****2.5.4a Seasonal Demand**

- Workspace needs fluctuate with the tourism calendar, leading to challenges in securing cost-effective leases that align with operational cycles.

**2.5.4b Infrastructure Limitations:**

- Accessibility issues, such as insufficient parking for large customer volumes, were noted as barriers for tourism-focused businesses.
- Older buildings often lack the infrastructure needed for high-footfall operations, such as catering facilities or event spaces.

2.5.4c Competition for Space:

- Tourism businesses compete with other sectors for centrally located or high-visibility spaces, which drives up costs and limits availability.
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2.5.5 Recommendations for Supporting Tourism and Leisure Businesses

2.5.5a Flexible and Seasonal Leasing:

- Introduce short-term and seasonal lease options for tourism operators to align workspace costs with peak revenue periods.

2.5.5b Invest in Event and Leisure Hubs:

- Develop multi-purpose hubs that cater to events, leisure activities, and customer-facing operations. These could include shared spaces for pop-up events or seasonal retail.

2.5.5c Address Accessibility Needs:

- Improve parking and transport links near tourism hotspots and leisure facilities to enhance customer convenience and support business growth.

2.5.5d Promote Workspace Availability to Tourism Operators:

- Create a centralised platform showcasing available workspaces suitable for tourism and leisure activities, including event hosting or pop-ups.

2.5.5e Streamline Planning Processes:

- Simplify planning approval for tourism-related workspace expansions, such as adding catering facilities or event storage.
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## 3. Summary of Common Issues

### 3.1 Workspace Availability

- Operators and survey respondents agree on the shortage of small, affordable workspaces for creative industries and scaling businesses
- Larger units suitable for scaling businesses are also scarce.

### 3.2 High Costs

- Rent affordability remains a critical issue, with many businesses unable to justify moving to better premises.
- Affordability of both housing and workspace is a key barrier for young people who want to live and work here.

### 3.3 Planning and Bureaucracy

- Long delays in planning processes and inflexible lease terms hinder workspace development and regeneration.

### 3.4 Limited Support

- A lack of centralised promotion of available workspaces and insufficient grants for workspace improvements or decarbonisation were frequently noted.
- An inconsistent or lack of an area-wide scheme that provides young people with routes to local work impacts on recruitment.

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## 4. Summary of Conflicting Responses

### 4.1 Perceptions of Workspace Sufficiency

- While a few respondents believed workspace availability was adequate, others strongly disagreed, particularly those seeking small, creative, or niche spaces.

### 4.2 Suitability of Current Premises

- A number of businesses indicated their current premises met their needs, particularly those working from home or operating on freehold properties.
- In contrast, others highlighted significant deficiencies in their current premises, including poor utilities and lack of flexibility.

### 4.3 Approach to Sustainability

- Some businesses had proactively taken steps to decarbonize, while others had not yet considered sustainability measures, citing cost or lack of support.

## 5. Summary of Opportunities

Bridport has significant opportunities to strengthen its economy and community by addressing workspace challenges. By improving flexibility, affordability, utilities, and workforce development, the town can:

- **Attract New and Diverse Businesses:** Flexible and energy-efficient workspaces will draw creative industries, small businesses, and tourism operators, enhancing Bridport's identity as a hub for innovation and independence.
- **Foster Entrepreneurship:** Affordable live-work units and targeted support programs can encourage entrepreneurship, especially among younger demographics.
- **Boost Economic Resilience:** Seasonal and short-term workspace options will support tourism and the broader economy, while reducing costs for small businesses will help them thrive and scale.
- **Develop a Skilled Workforce:** Strategic initiatives and partnerships will address skills gaps, create local employment opportunities, and retain young talent in Bridport.

By addressing these key areas, Bridport can build a competitive, inclusive, and vibrant business ecosystem.

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## 6. Summary of Recommended Updates to the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan (BANP) & Project Proposals

### 6.1 Increase Availability of Flexible and Affordable Workspaces

- Regarding **Policy EE1: Protection of Existing Employment Sites:**
  - Expand supporting text to ensure protection to sites and buildings that can or do provide flexible, small-business workspaces and shared workspaces, ensuring affordable and adaptable spaces. For example, The Old Timberyard, West Bay.
- Regarding **Policy EE2 – Provision for New & Small Businesses:**
  - Expand supporting text to include co-working hubs and live-work spaces; prioritise short-term, flexible leases for start-ups; and focus on partnerships or projects that secure funding to enable grants or incentives for retrofitting old buildings into affordable workspaces.
- **New BANP Objective Proposal:** Facilitate promotion of existing workspace options

- **New BANP Project proposal:** Establish a local workspace property partnership to unlock access to commercial property, map actual capacity needs, track and promote available workspaces, fundraise, and more:
  - Mapping ownership of commercial buildings
  - Creating and maintaining a centralised database of empty properties which could have the potential for redevelopment or immediate use
  - Build partnerships between private, public and third sector organisations to unlock 'difficult' buildings in the local area
  - Raise funding from national and regional opportunities to invest in local property and programming
  - Manage new development opportunities on disused land, such as increasing new commercial space (i.e. creating a 'box park' from containers)

## 6.2 Improve Infrastructure and Utilities

- **New BANP Objective Proposal:** Support existing workspace infrastructure improvements to directly respond to the need to improve or retrofit existing workspaces and building infrastructure to make them more energy efficient.
- Expand the **supportive text** for **Energy Efficiency in New Buildings** to include supporting retrofit projects and introducing grants for energy efficiency upgrades (insulation, heating, lighting) for existing buildings.
- **BANP New Project proposal:** Convene a group of contractors and suppliers who can specialise in retrofitting buildings for modern use.

## 6.3 Support Recruitment and Skills Development

- **New BANP Objective Proposal:** To develop strong partnerships between local businesses and local educational institutions to build pipelines of skilled workers.
- **New BANP Project Proposal:** Establishing a Skills & Apprenticeship Hub for hospitality, trades, and creative industries.
- To further support this **New Objective** and **Objective 6**, include provision to develop strong partnerships between local schools and businesses to offer training programs, and provide wage subsidies for apprenticeships.
- **New BANP Project Proposal:** Establish and hire a local connector/advisor role who plays an active link between local schools and local businesses.
- To further support **Objective 6: "To support socially balanced communities through measures that encourage younger people to live here"**, add supporting text that addresses the link between Workspace & Housing through encouraging mixed-use developments integrating workspace and housing; incentivising live-work units for freelancers and small businesses; and supporting conversion of unused commercial spaces into work-live hubs.

## 6.4 Encourage Sustainable Practices

- **New BANP Project Proposal:** Set up a decarbonisation support programme to help local businesses meet government targets, including increasing cost efficiencies and income generation income from renewables. Offer guidance and financial support for businesses looking to decarbonise, including grants for renewable energy installations. There is potential for workspace operators who have made progress – such as the Pineapple Estate – to work as advisors to other local businesses.
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## 7. Conclusion

By tackling key barriers such as limited flexible workspace availability, ageing infrastructure, and workforce development gaps, Bridport can enhance its identity as a vibrant hub for small businesses, creative industries, and tourism. Strategic investments in energy-efficient retrofits, live-work units, and mixed-use hubs will not only foster sustainability but also support businesses in scaling and thriving. Workforce initiatives targeting young professionals, coupled with infrastructure improvements, will ensure Bridport retains and attracts talent essential for economic growth.

**The success of these efforts depends on collaboration between local councils, businesses, and the community.** By prioritising adaptability, affordability, and sustainability, Bridport can build a competitive and inclusive business ecosystem, paving the way for a prosperous and resilient future. The recommendations outlined in this report are vital to achieving this vision and securing long-term growth for the area.

## 8. Appendices

### 1. Qualitative Interviews:

- a. [Ken Hussey, Bridport Market](#)
- b. [Hannah Dyke, Pineapple Business Park](#)
- c. [Ryan Holmes, Symonds & Sampson](#)
- d. [Martin Ridley, St Michael's Trading Estate](#)
- e. [Lesley Wilson, Dreadnought Trading Estate](#)
- f. [Gary Hedges and Hylton Jackson, Bridmet, Gore Cross Business Park](#)

### 2. Survey Data

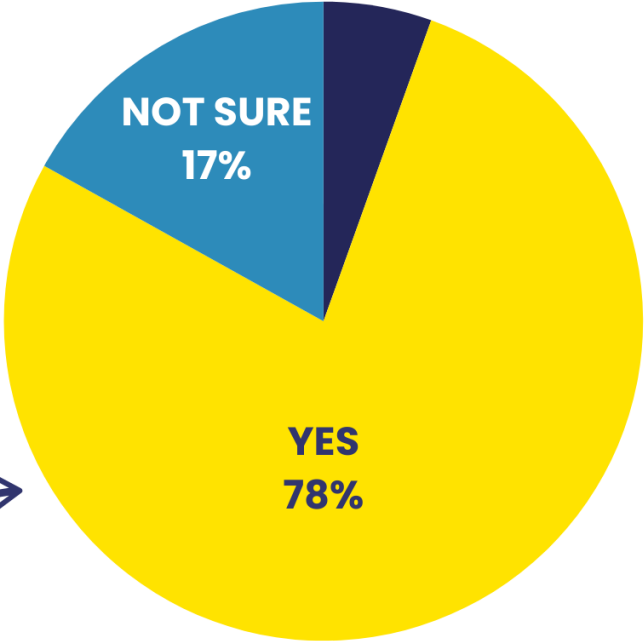
- a. Workspace & Employment Needs Survey, Bridport 2024
  - i. [Raw Data with Summary](#)
  - ii. [Individual Responses](#)
  - iii. [Summary of Key Data Points](#)

### 3. Graphs

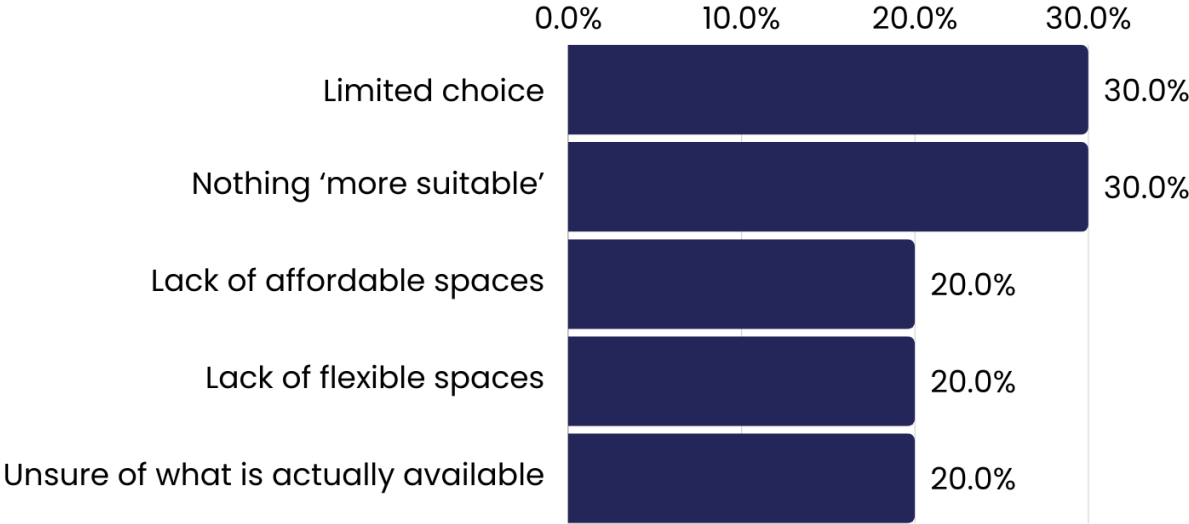
- a. [Do you think there is a lack of workspace availability in the area?](#)
  - b. [Does your current premises meet your needs?](#)
  - c. [Common infrastructure issues](#)
  - d. [Have you taken measures to decarbonise?](#)
  - e. [Employees under age 30](#)
-

A.

**DO YOU THINK THERE IS A LACK OF WORKSPACE AVAILABILITY IN THE AREA?**



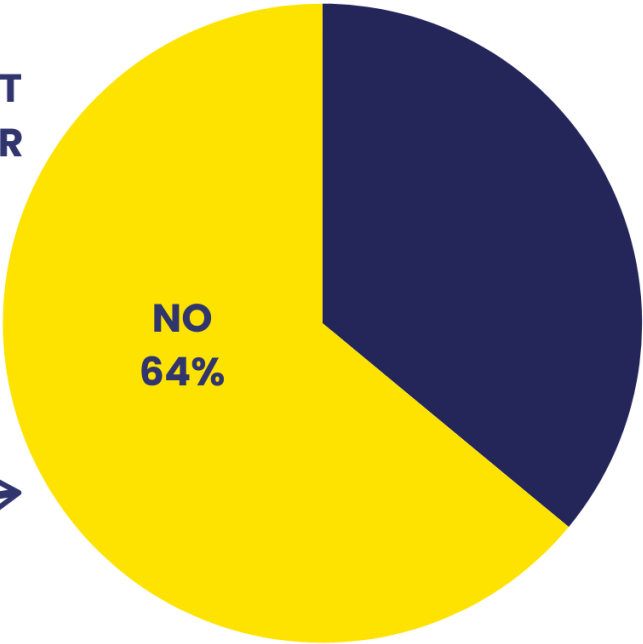
**RESONS GIVEN BY THESE RESPONDENTS**



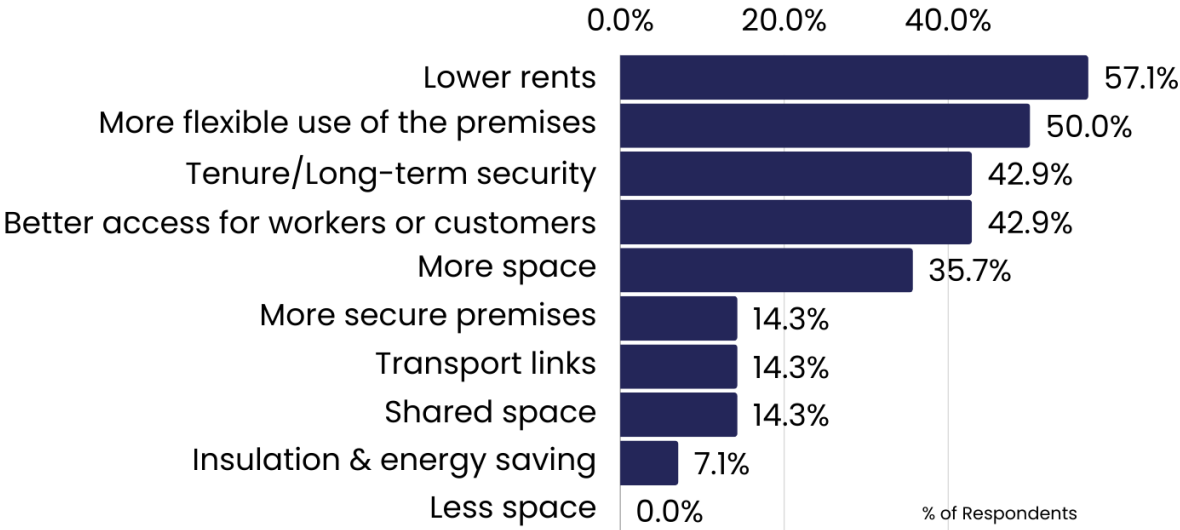


B.

**DOES YOUR CURRENT PREMISES MEET YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS?**

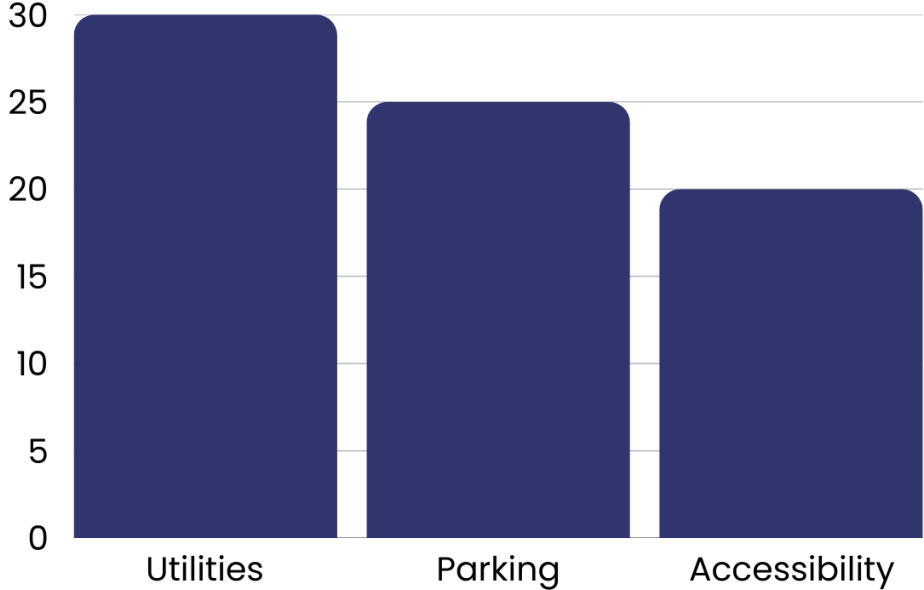


**PERCENTAGE OF THESE RESPONDENTS HIGHLIGHTING SPECIFIC WORKSPACE NEEDS**



C.

### PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS HIGHLIGHTING COMMON INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES



**Better access for workers and customers is a priority for our new premises.**

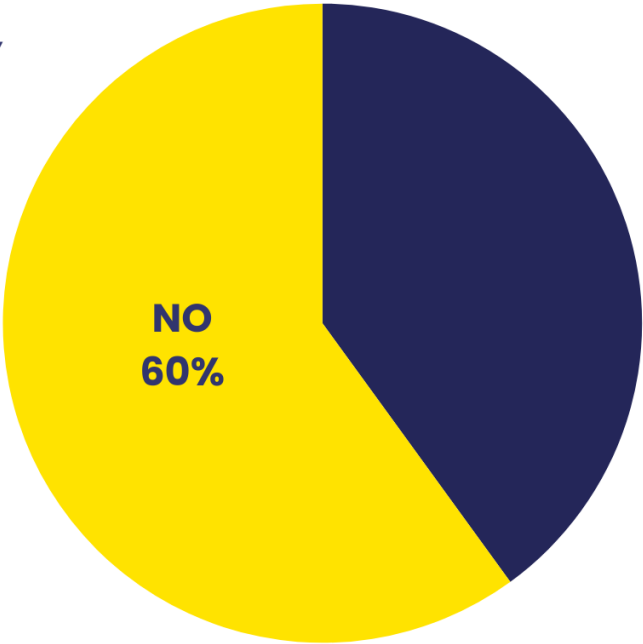
**Cost of utilities prevents us from moving to a more suitable workspace.**

**The landlord was reluctant to allocate specific parking spaces to an incoming tenant because business tax is charged when there are allocated parking spaces.**

**Parking for staff and customers is a major issue preventing a move to a new premises.**

D.

**HAVE YOU TAKEN ANY MEASURES TO DECARBONISE YOUR OPERATIONS?**



**“**  
The cost of changing equipment or installing renewables is high, and most businesses will need support from the government to make it viable.

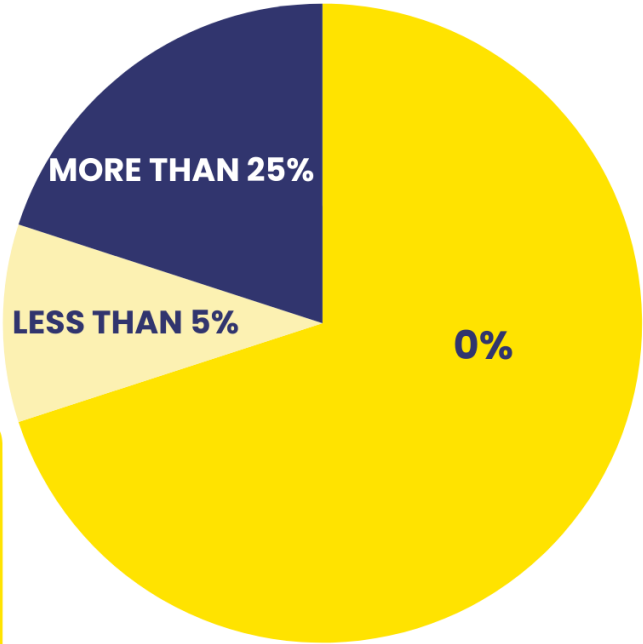
**“**  
Sustainability and energy efficiencies come later. Finding a suitable property is a priority.

**“**  
On-site storage and high rent costs make sustainability investments difficult.

**“**  
Businesses are interested in economic factors first, sustainability comes second.

E.

**WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR EMPLOYEES IS UNDER THE AGE OF 30?**



“  
For many younger people, their workspace is majority online. In terms of actual workspace needed, the very few enquiries we get are often looking for warehouse space or workshop space.

“  
There is not enough skilled labour – in any industry – and we need to train our own young people to do this type of skilled work.

“  
In terms of enquiries, less than 5% are from young people (25 and under), and probably less than 10% are from under 30s.

“  
Opportunities just are not there for young people, and I think this comes down to the relationship between schools and local employers. There is no engagement, which is both frustrating and surprising.

“  
The only choice for young people is to stay on in sixth form. Anything outside of the box is not supported. And this is wrong! It’s not good for anyone – not the community, not the businesses, not the kids.

## Summary of Key Data Points

### Who filled in the survey?

All survey respondents were from what can be classified as 'independent businesses' – (although some reported 'other', when looking at the responses given, these could all be independent businesses (ie, not part of national chains or franchises).

Respondents were distributed fairly evenly from a range of sectors, capturing the mix of businesses we have operating in the area.

Almost half of respondents work from the town centre, where a further  $\frac{1}{3}$  of respondents worked from home/remotely.

77.3% established in the area for at least 5 years, 63.3% for more than 10 years.

68% of respondents said they are **not** members of the Bridport Chamber of Commerce.

Just 25% said they were members of a small business federation or other trade association.

### Workspace data - Key findings

77% of respondents said there is a lack of workspace availability in the area. They said this is because:

- Limited choice
- Lack of affordable spaces
- Lack of flexible spaces
- Nothing 'more suitable'
- Unsure of what is actually available

64% of respondents said their current premises do not meet their business needs. For these respondents, they are looking for:

- 7% - more energy efficient
- 14% - more secure
- 28% - better transport links and parking facilities
- 28% - better access for customers or workers
- 35% - more space
- 43% - more long-term security
- 57% - more affordable rent
- 64% - more flexible use of space

So why not just move? The reasons given that are preventing a move:

- Availability / quality of utilities      57%

- Rent costs 64%
- Cost of utilities 28.6%
- Accessibility 7%
- On-site storage 28.6%

Most are happy with the type of premises they have. Just 25% said they're looking to move to a different type or premises (ie, out of town centre, off a trading estate)

Of those who are looking to move, 75% have been looking to move for under 2 years, with 16% spending more than 5 years looking to move.

57% of respondents are leasing their workspace, 21% own the freehold, and 16% are working from home.

Of those who are leasing their workspaces, 62.5% say it's affordable, and 37.5% say it is not affordable.

Renters have an average of 3 years left on their lease. 62.5% say they plan to renew for up to 3 to 6 more years, and 37.5% say they do not plan to renew. However almost 40% say they find it difficult to renegotiate their lease terms.

If the government removes discounts for business rates it will affect 80% of respondents businesses.

## Employment data - Key findings

242 workers employed by respondents. Just 20% organisations employed 15 or more. 80% employed 4 or fewer.

Avg 9.47 FTE, but  $\frac{1}{3}$  were 20+ and  $\frac{2}{3}$  were under 4 (micro businesses)

50% of respondents say their employees are on permanent contracts, with the other half offering fixed-term, seasonal, zero-hours, and freelance contracts.

66% reported they employ no under 30s. Almost 25% respondents said they employ more than 25% of under 30s.

55% of respondents say they are a living wage employer. 20% say they are not.

There is a split between remote working, with 45% not offering it, and 45% offering it and their employees use it. 10% said they offer it but their employees do not take advantage of it.

84% said their employees travel mostly by private transport. And 58% say there is adequate parking. 11% said there is not adequate parking.

## Recruitment & skills data

42% of respondents said they find recruiting new employees difficult. 26% said understaffing is a problem for their business.

1/3 of respondents said employees need formal qualifications to work in their organisation.

30% of respondents said new employees have the skills they need to work, while 30% said their new employees do not have the skills they need.

59% said they find they need to provide training and new skills to new employees, with 52% of these providing training in house

## Decarbonisation data

40% of respondents said they have taken measures to decarbonise their business operations. Of these, 87.5% have switched to renewable suppliers. Other steps taken include investing in sustainable transportation (37.5%), renewable installations (12.5%), and retrofitting (12.5%).

Only 5% of respondents said they have support with decarbonisation, and for those 84% who do not have support, a handful of respondents said they would welcome support if the cost was affordable or if it were free.

None of the respondents have benefited from sustainability grants schemes.