

Workplace operators Qualitative Survey

Interviewee: Hannah Dyke

Workspace: Pineapple

Location: Salway Ash - rural

Type of workspace: Business Park

How long have you been providing workspace: 15+ years

Key questions:

- 1. Do you think Bridport's workspace offer matches business needs now? And do you think it can respond to future trends (ie, Shifts to smaller or bigger workspaces, serviced workspace, or in and out of town spaces?)*

From how we position ourselves – we try to grow with our tenants. We are relationship based, and a family business. We have grown and changed with our tenants over the last 25+ years, so we can help them prosper and grow.

For example, many of our tenants originally had a smaller space and have grown, leading to taking on additional units on the park. On occasion we have built additional space or updated properties to better suit the tenant. The majority of people of working age living in West Dorset, and not involved in agriculture, live outside of the market towns, this is not recognised by current planning and growth policies.

We have changed our offering over the years, to adapt to what is in demand. Meaning, we're often adapting spaces or give the tenant freedom to alter the space as needed. Although it is hard to say if other workspaces will change to suit what businesses need, I feel we have a proactive approach that will continue to create offerings that suit the needs of business.

There are units and spaces available in the area, but I am not sure that the target audience is aware of what is to offer. I feel the best way to ensure businesses can find the space they need is to first ensure people are aware of what commercial property / workspace is available. In order to reach its economic targets, Dorset Council should look to promote business opportunities more than they currently do and grow the economic development team, promoting it to one of the most important within the Council structure.

- 2. How have occupancy rates/level of vacancy changed at your workspace over the last few years? (ie are they stable, or significantly up or down)*

It's been very steady here. We tend to have one tenant leave each year. We usually find our tenants via word of mouth and not paid for advertisement.

Although we have an ongoing brand awareness campaign. This is a real positive, but I do feel we could be doing more to tell people we are here. However, I feel we lack the skills internally to tackle this effectively.

Whilst we have changed our offering over the years, we have always focused on creating a positive work environment. This extends beyond the unit and includes having more parking, an onsite shop, guest wifi outside, outside space for breaks and walks.

3. What types of businesses exist in your workspace (i.e. parks, estates, high streets)?

We have 3 mechanics, 1 organic skincare production company, an artisan food company, an acupuncture online retailer, an event hire company, a tax charity, and a landscape recovery charity. We also operate a self storage site, which businesses often rent for businesses storage (stock, equipment for trades, paperwork etc).

4. What changes have there been in the type of businesses operating in these trading spaces? (ie, more food, less manufacturing, more storage, etc)

Creation spaces are in more demand. For example, building, welding, production spaces for products.

Office space is not in high demand, due to the ease of working from home.

~~*5. Do you see a trend of businesses starting small and scaling up? For example, have your tenants moved in because of a change in their business needs?*~~

6. Do you have an overall 'identity' or priorities for your workspace tenants, or are you agnostic on what types of businesses can operate from your workspace?

Our identity is largely connected to our surroundings. We are on a farm and we use this to attract the type of tenant that would enjoy being in this environment. We are a rural businesses park, which is a niche and may not be for everyone but we use it to our advantage. For example, we have opened up more permissive paths so the tenants can enjoy the space. We have solar panels on the farm and commercial buildings, to help supply the park. All the energy used on the business park is renewable. We have planted a wildflower meadow for people to enjoy and feed the birds next to seating areas. We also calculate our carbon emissions as a business but also our sequestration on the farm, preparing ourselves for the need for the SME's onsite that will need carbon offsetting.

It's important for tenants to understand what we offer, as we're largely looking for long term tenants. We want everyone to have a good experience over the time they are here. We don't take a 'salesman' approach and we're not after a quick sell.

We are not exclusive, but we work to build a community feel and as part of that, we wouldn't take on competing businesses without first discussing it with the current

tenant.

We have a wide mixture of building configurations, including, kitchens, office space, warehouses and production space. Our buildings range in sizes, which facilitates a mixture of businesses with various offerings.

7. Do you have a marketing strategy to find new tenants? Do you find it costly to invest in marketing to attract new tenants?

We try to promote a brand, and this generates organic leads on social media. If we have a unit available, we email all established tenants before we communicate externally.

In terms of advertising, we have a commercial agent, update the website with sales blurb and images, paid google ads... we do not use Facebook Marketplace, although we would post in on social media.

We don't have a strong marketing strategy. This is something that could be improved.

8. Do you have any information/understanding on why businesses don't follow through with tenancy after their initial enquiries?

Sometimes people reach out but are not the right fit – it's a mutual decision. The reasons are mixed and very specific to the individual/business needs. For example, artic lorry access or needing very high ceilings for art work. Every business has very specific needs and we may not have the perfect space for them.

And we are a rural business park, and this potentially influences the type of leads we get. I assume our website narrows down who reaches out – we have tried our best to communicate our offering via our website, i.e. rural, countryside style and this may not suit all businesses.

9. Do you work in partnership with a local estate agent? How do you set your lease terms or rents?

We do market research on what the going rates should be. And we use a commercial agent for advice. We want to be competitive locally, but also, we offer things that others don't: free parking, excellent wifi across the estate, meeting room, coffee shop, apple orchard, and those interpersonal 'softer' skills that come with creating a community here. We firmly believe rural space can achieve a premium over intown, if it's done right.

10. Have you made any changes to your lease terms based on business demand (ie, shorter lease terms, adjustments to rent, etc)

We have developed our leases, learning from our experience of dealing with small

businesses. Whilst our leases have a degree of inbuilt flexibility, many of our tenants have been with us for 10 years plus and the longest for over 20 years.

We implemented steps during Covid to help tenants, but since then prices have increased for us all. But we have worked to keep rents fair and reasonable. We have an open door policy with tenants. We chat to most of them each week, which helps us understand what they need.

~~11. Have you adapted your units/made any renovations to accommodate incoming tenants or respond to perceived business demands?~~

12. *Bridport Town Council wants to know about the needs of young people. How many of your tenants are under the age of 30? Do you have much demand for your workspace from the younger demographic? And what kind of space are they looking for/renting?*

Some of the people who work here are in the younger demographic, but not any of the tenants themselves. We had one enquiry recently who was looking for space for their business offering, but it didn't work out. They found a place elsewhere.

We have The Work Nook – a hot desking room/meeting room/studio for yoga etc. This is a new offering, recently brought to the market. Used by tenants and general community. This is starting to gain traction, but it has been slow going. If there's anywhere the council can help with is reaching the market audience, we would be pleased to engage.

13. *As a workspace operator, do you feel your business is affected by any government policies (ie rates system)?*

Previously rural business were largely ignored and left largely to its own devices. The current Government, whilst talking of growth and innovation, hasn't adopted many policies to help promote SME's. There is no understanding of what motivates the average SME owner we fear there could be negative consequence both locally and nationally as a result of the current policies.

Locally policies are not joined up. On one hand we feel we are seen as a cash injections via business rates, but because we are off an unclassified public road, we don't get the drains adequately cleared, the road gritted or our voices heard. One example would be the foot path at the junction at of the B3162 and Pineapple Lane. We pointed out at several stages during planning and construction that it would restrict access into the lane, only to be informed that would not be the case. Unfortunately, it is very much the case. Post build we have been promised dropped curbs, removal of the bollards, but nothing is forthcoming. For over a year we have been trying to get a meeting with the Councils Highway department, but they do not respond to emails. Another example is the reduced access on North Allington as restrictions on double yellow parking is not enforced.

Local businesses have thoughts and ideas on how to make effective decisions but we do not feel heard.

14. Bridport Town Council supports the Bridport economy and is keen to see businesses thrive and make steps toward more sustainable practices. As a workspace operator, how do you see your role and responsibilities within local economic development?

As a family business, we're passionate about looking after the farm and its environs. We believe we have a responsibility to make this space better for future generations. There are tenants who really like and buy into that ethos. However, we need to strive for both financial and environmental sustainability. We need to continue to be affordable whilst working to reduce our footprint and encourage wildlife.

Our environmental work is important to many of our tenants. Creating a positive place to work is probably a large reason why so many tenants have stayed for such a long time.

We want to be able to offer SME's the opportunity to work in a space, where looking after the environment is a priority. We're preparing ourselves for when all businesses need to be carbon neutral and to be able to offset our tenants' carbon emissions. Whilst it's not currently a legal obligation, we feel we are ahead of the curve. We have the data – we know our water consumption, waste, energy use. When new legislation comes in for small businesses, we are getting prepared.

We want to protect this beautiful part of Dorset for future generations. It's what we strive for – it excites us!

15. Have you taken any measures to decarbonise your workspaces and/or make them more sustainable? Examples; energy saving, energy generation, electric vehicle charging etc

See above.

What we have done;

Growing more trees, planted a wildflower meadow, have a rewilded paddock, have onsite energy generation, the businesses park is supplied with renewable energy if the solar isn't generating enough, the lighting is all LED.

We do not have electric vehicle charging points, but would be interested, as when we have one previously it was not reliable, but we will no doubt look again in the future. We do not have the ability to store solar energy, although it has been looked in to on several occasions.

~~*16. From your perspective, who should foot the bill/take responsibility for making*~~

~~energy efficiency upgrades to units in your workspace?~~

17. *Any other information you'd like to share about workspace availability and provision in the area?*

The main thing is reputation, continue brand marketing and being connected so people who are looking to start new businesses know where to go. We are never sure if we're getting the word out effectively!

In terms of commuters and pollution – these issues are repeatedly slogans used in politics, but we've not seen any real changes materialise. We don't want to just build more car parks – we want to embrace more fully renewable, and green, transit. For example, bus routes, ebike schemes etc.

We would welcome an ongoing dialog with Bridport Town Council, to bring forward ideas, and solutions, which progresses both our agendas.