

Workplace operators Qualitative Survey

Interviewee: Lesley Wilson

Workspace: Dreadnought Estate

Location: Bridport

Type of workspace: Trading estate

How long have you been providing workspace: Lesley - 18 years (working for previous owners and current owners)

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?)

No, I don't think it's adequate now. We get so many enquiries for the small size unit or small to medium units. We get loads of these queries and there is not enough room. We don't get many enquiries from national business (only very occasionally), and we don't get many from people looking for large space.

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)

They have changed. With previous owners I only did accounts and admin so I'm not fully aware, but from what I have seen and heard, I would say back then it would go through phases where there would be some vacant units. With the new owner there are no empty units and a waiting list. They can charge more rent now, with Foundry Lea being built we'll be right in the middle of it! The previous owner was very careful about who was on the estate, and would make sure it "fit". Now the owner is much more broadminded.

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

During and immediately after Covid we had so many people enquiring who had started businesses from home and needed space. Those enquiries have simmered down now. One unit became vacant and the owner was letting it out for creative types with small businesses. We have more enquiries for catering businesses or food & drink businesses. Mercato is going really well, and we have another one-man food business who uses his unit to prep and cook food.

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

~~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? Or is trading on the market a pipeline to other trading spaces? (i.e. retail/industrial)~~

When the size or needs of a business changes, we do our best to accommodate them and shuffle things around, rather than lose tenants.

Insurance costs have risen, but we have not passed this on to tenants yet. The previous owners would have. The new owner treats this more like a 'hobby' – they want happy tenants and thriving estate.

If rents were higher, we might lose a few tenants.

~~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?~~

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 get enquiries through word of mouth and via the website. When I first took on this role, there was a multinational business that moved out, so 2 quite large units. We used Facebook advertising and filled them.

We haven't used any agents ever. There is a new tenant relocating from Norfolk as they really like the vibe of Bridport.

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

It's 50/50 in terms of people looking at space even if it isn't fit for purpose. It's usually to do with size and therefore cost, and layout. Everyone wants roller doors. And parking is a major issue on the estate. We wouldn't take another garage or another Mercato because of the parking issues, as other businesses need to be able to conduct their business without interference.

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

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

The new owner is more amenable to putting break clauses in new leases. For legal reasons, leases are all the same 6 yrs 11 months. The old landlord would hold people to their lease, and if tenants wanted to move out early, they would have to find people to take on the lease. This is not happening now. We are aware that things are different now with businesses, and we try to help them.

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

Yes. We've built new ones to replace old ones that weren't worth updating. And we've made major adaptations to the largest one on the estate. We also have split units to create more smaller spaces.

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?

There has been more demand from young creative people, and some looking at the catering units. And we get some enquiries from young people, but they aren't viable businesses for us, because we don't have any spare small spaces. This is what they're looking for.

We have a gym on the estate. The owner might have been under 30 when he came on. He has a big space and has been making it work.

There is one young person who has taken over from his father's garage and expanded the business. One other young person is a creative, and their parents are using the space as well to help her out.

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

Yes, in one instance the landlord was reluctant to allocate specific parking spaces to an incoming tenant because business tax is charged when there is allocated parking spaces. (Well, I'm not sure if this is a thing or not!)

~~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?~~

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

Not yet, but the new owner is very aware about rules on minimum EPC ratings on units. They looked into electric charging points for vehicles, but this is on the back burner at the moment. And solar panels a 'no' right now, which might be because of the state of the roofs. Tenants are not allowed to do this themselves on Dreadnought.

~~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?

Two main things to add: Many years ago, Dreadnought was started as a seed estate for new businesses starting out. And there is still a need for that. We get a lot of enquires from St Michaels (either that have had significant growth, and/or have concern for future of St Michaels). A seed estate would help younger people.

And secondly, the Foundry Lea is a concern for this estate. There is a big pedestrian and cycle route through the entrance to the estate, which in my view is a mega problem. I'm concerned someone could get killed, because there are huge articulated vehicles that come in and out of here and this could become a problem with more people and cycle/pedestrians in the area.

In terms of the infrastructure planned with the new development, it is needed but it needs to be considerate of what is already there.

Flooding has not been a problem in all my years here. Only one time have I seen it up against the pipe... But in the last four years, this has happened frequently. Perhaps this is due to climate change. At the moment, the bridge on Magdalene holds the water back and floods Vearse farm. But this could change drastically with the Foundry Lea build.

There is no joined up thinking around this.