

## **Place-making and Innovation Executive Advisory Board**

### **Digital Games EAB Briefing Note 20 May 20 2019**

#### **Background**

As one of the most important hubs of digital games development in the country and worldwide, Guildford hosts over 70 companies engaged in this sector including EA Games, Media Molecule, Supermassive Games and Ubisoft. A number of world-renowned games have been produced in Guildford and the Borough was famously described by a journalist in the Guardian as the '*the Hollywood of Games*'.

The emergence of the sector was significantly influenced by Guildford born Peter Molyneux who created Bullfrog Productions that produced the Dungeon Keeper game. Electronic Arts eventually bought Bullfrog. Molyneux later went on to form Lionhead Studios who created the Black & White game. Lionhead were eventually purchased by Microsoft (but closed the facility 18 months ago). Peter Molyneux has since set up a new studio called 22 cans on Surrey Research Park.

The University of Surrey continues to have an important role through academic links primarily through the Centre for Vision, Speech and Signal processing, music technology expertise and through a specialist partnership officer, Sam Read, who worked locally in the industry for a number of years. However, Guildford is not the only leading hub, and others such as Dundee, Bournemouth and Leamington Spa are growing in reputation and attracting investment. As with Guildford, these hubs have an annual Festival, a dedicated website (although with Dundee this is broader and includes all digital sectors and in Leamington, there is a games start-up office funded by the LEP and district Council).

Industry leaders recognised that in order for the sector to flourish, better co-ordination of events and promotion was required and G3 ('Galvanising Guildford Gaming' – sponsored by Charles Russell Speechlys and UKIE (United Kingdom Interactive Entertainment) has been established to provide thought leadership, collaboration and increased liaison with the University.

The G3 Group have run a regular summer networking event for the sector and other events focussed on recruiting graduates and a seminar on attracting investment. The G3 Group also put in a specific submission to the Government as part of its consultation on the Local Industrial Strategy, highlighting what it needed to ensure the sector remained sustainable and this included:

- Adequate provision of flexible, competitively priced office space
- Local talent pool, particularly computer scientists
- A new degree in digital games to be developed at the University of Surrey
- Better digital connectivity
- More higher level showcasing events and promotion to boost Guildford's reputation (UKIE feel that more needs to be done to 'fly the flag' for the local sector)

## **Facts & Figures**

- In 2017 the UK Games Market was worth £5.11bn.
- UK is the fifth largest video games market in terms of revenues after China, USA, Japan and Germany. 32.4m people in the UK regularly play games.
- Average weekly hours of gaming is 9.5 hours which is ahead of France, Germany and Spain.
- The Guildford Cluster has 70 videogame development studios.
- 4030 games released.
- 1500 creative industry professionals.
- 31 years of history.

## **Future Plans and how Guildford Borough Council can provide support**

- The first Guildford **Games Festival** will take place on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> June at G-live. GBC is the lead funding partner for the event, which will be led by UKIE. Other key partners are the University of Surrey and Enterprise M3 Growth Hub.
- The 28<sup>th</sup> will be an industry day, the 29<sup>th</sup> will be open to the public (public showcase). There are other complementary events on the 27<sup>th</sup> (Supermassive Charity Games Night) and 29<sup>th</sup> (evening). Guildford Games Awards at the Boilerroom.
- The content for the Festival will focus on business support, careers advice, investor readiness, a 'virtual studio' exhibition and history of digital games showcase, the launch of a specific Guildford Games website and a new Made in Guildford 'Trade Mark' for all games designed and launched here. The website will highlight local studios, the history of the sector and an Invest in Guildford page. The website will be hosted by the University of Surrey.
- By developing a skills plan for the sector to include discussions with the University of Surrey and Guildford College and other HE and FE organisations in the wider LEP area.
- Facilitating technology transfer between the sector and other sectors such as aerospace and automotive.
- Ensuring we have adequate digital infrastructure to support the demands of the sector.

## **Outcomes for the Council**

- This supports our Corporate Plan under the Innovation Theme to 'Deliver a bespoke business support plan for gaming and digital health sectors'.
- This is also a priority for the innovation & Strategy Board and a key objective for Enterprise M3 as part of their emerging local industrial strategy.
- It would help promote Guildford both nationally and internationally as a key digital games cluster.
- It should help grow and sustain businesses already in the Borough but also drive exports and inward investment and future office occupiers.
- It will engage the public in a rapidly growing sector, but one that has a low carbon footprint.
- Consolidate Guildford Borough Council's reputation as being business friendly.
- In terms of the work with UKIE, we will focus on Legacy which would involve targets of ( 1) a 5% per annum increase in new studios/Gaming companies in the Borough

over 3 years (2) one new inward investment project per annum over 3 years (3). The development of a specific digital games skills academy.

Chris Burchell