



The story of our merger and renaming

Overview

In 2018, The National Centre for Craft & Design (NCCD) and countywide arts development agency artsNK merged to create one organisation that delivers great art experiences for more people, in Sleaford and across North Kesteven.

With a continued focus and commitment to craft and design, over the last few years the Centre has developed a broader cultural programme of exhibitions, retail, learning & education, special events, performances, festivals and community art projects. All serving the needs of local residents, communities and visiting audiences.

In May 2020, North Kesteven District Council started a major £1.2m capital refurbishment of the Centre to grow and sustain the District's arts and cultural offer. The year-long project created new multi-use dance & conferencing studio space, a craft workshop, indoor & outdoor CafeBar, and new ground floor gallery space, alongside the Centre's celebrated main gallery and shop.

In spring 2021, the Centre re-opened as the **Hub** — a new purpose-built cultural venue that presents new opportunities to inspire local residents and audiences for years to come.



2001



2003



January 2021 — courtesy of Lindum Group

The case for change

The National Centre for Craft & Design has evolved significantly since the merger, expanding its programmes to include dance, aerial, performance, music, poetry, film and much more. With newly refurbished facilities the ambition is to grow this further and create a cultural hub for the community in every sense.

Whilst our name and status as a national centre for craft and design are both at the heart of what we do, it isn't inclusive of everything we now deliver. So, since 2018 we have been consulting with local people, artists, visitors, groups, participants, staff, stakeholders, funders and partners, to listen, learn and make sure we build and plan a new future that serves everyone.

This is a summary of the consultation that informed our merger and renaming.

Objectives of renaming

Our future vision is to deliver a high quality multi arts programme in Sleaford, and across NK's rural communities and beyond.

A programme that is built upon the need and ambition of our residents and audiences and provides opportunity for everyone to experience and be inspired by arts & culture.

By merging two renowned organisations we knew early on that we would need to create a new brand that:

- Creates a more holistic and distinctive identity and name for the building, organisation and programmes.
- Builds a bigger profile and reputation of all the creative work we do.
- Builds stronger links with partners & people locally, regionally and nationally.
- Reinforces local ownership & love without compromising national status.
- Improves communication and reduce costs through the merger of websites, social media, brands and names.

What our consultation told us

We spoke to as many people as possible about how to achieve our vision and objectives and create positive change from the refurbishment and renaming that truly reflects the needs of our communities and visitors.

Around 1,000 people took part in our consultation which included face to face conversations, focus group sessions, team workshops, meetings, and an online survey. We also worked with North Kesteven District Council and surveyed 642 people online and at venues and events across the district.

This is a snapshot of the conversations and feedback we received:

- Close to half (46%) of the respondents who gave their home postcode live in the NG34 area. 22% of respondents were from outside Lincolnshire.
- The majority (72%) of respondents visited NCCD occasionally in a typical month with the exhibitions given as the main reason (51%) for visiting.
- Visitors rated live performances (chosen by 54%) and visual arts activities (55%) as the top things to see.
- The spaces most likely to be used on the ground floor were larger and outdoor café spaces (with Wi-Fi) and workshops.
- The most important factor to ensure customer expectations continue to be met, was the provision of high-quality exhibitions, rated very important by 78% and important by a further 17%.
- Inclusivity, accessibility and reasonably priced events and activities were also considered to be particularly important.
- Over half (55%) of survey respondents offered further comments on what would encourage them to visit. These included improving advertising and signage for the venue, its exhibitions and events and not losing focus on any of the things that it already does well or its status as the National Centre for Craft and Design.
- Lots of comments were made on the types of activities to offer including dance, painting, drawing, printing, nature/wildlife, film/video, photography, fine art, architecture, engineering, wood carving, needlework and mixed media.

- Other things that people rated were talks/lectures, a cinema, theatre, a better café, music events, child friendly activities, yoga classes, a library, tourist information and opportunities to meet artists.
- Some respondents were concerned about the possible impact of these ideas on the core focus of NCCD, craft and design, which they did not want to see detracted from.

We also consulted with our regular arts groups:

- Some artists and makers commented that they would be happy to offer their expertise to help facilitate workshop activities, perhaps in exchange for free use of the facilities.

Workshops bring people into the NCCD — if there is a wide variety of interesting craft activities and the space to cater for those who want to participate, there will be more footfall in the building, more people using the café, spending money in the shop and visiting the exhibitions whilst they are there.

*Art and craft in the community must be encouraged.
There needs to be greater engagement with the community.*

In 2019/20 we carried out in-depth audience analysis to look at who was visiting NCCD and taking part in arts activities:

- Over 125,000 people visited NCCD from April 2019 to mid-March 2020.
- 72% of visitors came from across Lincolnshire. Of this, 55% lived in Sleaford.
- Compared to the previous year, Lincolnshire audiences grew by 16% and Sleaford audiences by 33%.
- Female audiences dominated with 73.5%.
- Audiences aged 25–34yrs increased by 105% and 2% over the last two years. Similarly, we saw a 118% increase in 35–44 yrs. These changes directly link to marketing which focussed on attracting families to wider creative programmes & events during the year.
- Audiences aged 45–54yrs decreased from 16% to 7% over the last two years and we saw a 10% decrease compared to 2018/19 of audiences aged 55+ however, compared to 2017/18 this audience increased by 35%.
- Diverse audiences increased from 4% to 7%.



Following the Centre's rebrand in 2010, 'The National Centre for Craft & Design' put Sleaford on the cultural map with visitors doubling in number over the last eleven years. As part of our consultation, we carried out a random face to face survey at the centre and at several key local community events, to ask people 'what do you call the Centre?'

- Over 80% of those that we talked to refer to the building as the 'Hub'.

Other quotes included:

Sleaford is very lucky to have this place.

I have travelled up specifically to see this, it's fantastic (Visitor from Oxford).

Becoming involved with NCCD has had the greatest positive affect on my practice ever.

Had an amazing trip here, wow, love them all, never been here, amazing trip, I come from Australia, amazing, omg!

It's an absolutely fantastic place & the exhibitions are superb, thank you for making us feel so welcome!

We live in London & when visiting family in Ruskington we always come here. It is so welcoming and active. You see things here we would never see in London, especially the smaller shows. What is up there now is so beautiful, it's wonderful!

I do not think I've ever been to a Centre before where I have just smiled all the way round!

The building, in my opinion, is not very welcoming, there is no buzz! I am generally not able to find crafts people in action in the centre.

NCCD is one of the primary centres for excellence in high-end craft and design in the UK and it is vital that changes to the building strengthen and support this focus, rather than undermine or dilute it.

Do things that allow kids to feel a sense of achievement and worth.

In summary:

- The Centre's craft and design programmes are highly regarded, and any change must build and strengthen the reputation as a national centre for craft & design.
- A wider programme of creative arts opportunities is welcomed, and respondents had lots of ideas about how to grow and develop this.
- The Centre is a creative hub for the local community, and we should encourage more local people to use it.
- The Centre is a great regional and local venue!
- Eleven years after rebranding as The National Centre for Craft & Design, the building is still referred to locally as the Hub.

A new future for the Hub

The consultation was crucial in helping us to reimagine a new future and inspire a new vision and in May 2021 we re-opened the **Hub**.

The Hub is a nationally renowned Centre that delivers an inspiring programme of creative arts & cultural experiences in Sleaford and across North Kesteven and beyond.

Home to the national centre for craft and design, our celebrated exhibitions showcase contemporary artists and makers from around the world. Our shop stocks an ever-changing collection of handmade craft objects and design gifts, and our CaféBar is a great place to enjoy locally sourced specialty food and drink.

The Hub offers a dynamic learning programme of workshops, talks, classes, competitions, special events and performances for all people, ages and abilities. We deliver creative activities in schools, community & care settings and online; and we work with our communities & partners to coordinate participatory arts projects, events, festivals, celebrations and public commissions.

We're also home to Design-Nation, the UK's leading portfolio network for designers & makers of craft, design, and product.

The Hub is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, owned and supported by North Kesteven District Council and operated by Lincs Inspire Limited, a Lincolnshire based charity.



Thank you to everyone that took part in our consultation and helped to create a new future for Sleaford's historic arts venue.

'This used to be
a seed warehouse...
It still is!'



Working in Partnership to Inspire North Kesteven



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For more information visit
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