



CULTURE REIMAGINED

Kate Young talks to Linda Sullivan from Venture South, which seeks to generate local growth in the creative industries via projects such as Filmwight and Sculpture South

The Isle of Wight has long been a melting pot of creative icons and original thinkers – including Dickens, Karl Marx, Turner, Tennyson, pioneering Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron and many more.

Now there is a dynamic new force in the mix in the form of Venture South, The Isle of Wight Cultural Investment Company.

Cultural regeneration is well known and Venture South is hoping to put the island firmly back on the map, both nationally and internationally, via some exciting arts, culture and heritage projects.

Venture South was founded about two years ago and is spearheaded by founder and chair Linda Sullivan who lives on the

southern tip of the Isle of Wight. Linda has a background in finance for the creative industry and is a partner at Cavendish Corporate Finance with a career including ventures in media, entertainment, charitable causes and the arts. Venture South now has six board members, none of whom are paid for their involvement, but have joined the team because they believe in the potential to change the Isle of Wight for good.

Linda explained: “Our key objective is to be a catalyst for change, a facilitating body which will help unlock the place-making potential of the Isle of Wight’s cultural sector and create jobs for islanders.

“Creative industries are the largest employer in the UK and the fastest-growing sector – it’s not just artists and writers, but those who make video games, film-makers,

digital technology entrepreneurs and much more. The Isle of Wight punches well above its weight in this sector and creative industries tend to have lower emissions, which also fits in well with our island’s biosphere reserve status.”



Linda Sullivan

ON SET PHOTOGRAPHY BY GIANPAOLO MARIO GIANCOVICH



Research has shown the way that cultural regeneration can transform a place. The Covid crisis has also meant more people than ever have realised they can work from home too, which has prompted many to think about leaving traditional employment hotspots such as cities.

In 2018 Venture South met with the Arts Council and during his visit to the island, Darren Henley, the Arts Council's CEO, encouraged Venture South and the Island's cultural community to think big. He said: "There's no reason why the Isle of Wight couldn't be the coolest place to live in ten years' time."

Venture South gained some seed funding from the Arts Council, which it is using to kick-start projects and undertake vital research. One of the first things they did was to encourage arts, cultural and heritage bodies on the island to work more cohesively together, which led to the creation of The Island Collection, a registered charity.

Venture South also looked at cultural projects in Cornwall, Margate and Folkestone to gain insights into how they worked and how they attracted funding to their areas, which encouraged more tourism and



regeneration.

The Isle of Wight has been the setting for a number of films and television programmes in the past - including the first Britbox scripted production, *The Beast Must Die*, and *Victoria and Abdul*, which starred Judy Dench.

Encouraged by the success of Cornwall and other regions securing millions of pounds of revenues from film and TV production and resulting film tourism, one of Venture South's best-known projects to date is the launch of Filmwight, the Island's official film office, earlier this year.

The creation of Filmwight was the result of a year of hard work particularly from Linda and Venture South co-director Stephen Izatt,

founder of Ventnor Arts Club and a well-known branding company.

Filmwight has already been endorsed by Creative England, the Isle of Wight Council, industry body Film Offices UK and the Filming in England partnership. Sponsorship from Wightlink has led to the development of the Filmwight pass to offer discounts to film and television crews.

Filmwight has appointed Dave Russell, known locally as Meridian Dave, as its film officer and exists to promote the Island as a location for film, television and advertising production to benefit all island businesses.

The producer Ed Rubin, of New Regency Television, who produced the recent BritBox series *The Beast Must Die*, was first brought

Living

to the island by Dave. Filmwight recently assisted the production team of *Strange Waters*, a film being shot on the island and written and produced by Rowena Amos from Ventnor, and several advertising production teams.

Filmwight's experienced team are dedicated to making the island a place where film, television and commercial photographic projects can take place easily and efficiently. It has also been working with Newport-based music college Platform One.

Linda added: "Filmwight is one of the few film offices in the UK which is not funded by the local authority - we have managed to set it up and fund it and I am very proud of that."

One of Venture South's next aims is the creation of an Isle of Wight film studio to further enhance the island's appeal for the film, television, advertising and gaming industries. It is hoped the studio will have additional areas for related creatives, such as carpenters and visual effects experts, to have their own workspaces similar to those at Pinewood and Shepperton studios.

The beauty of the Isle of Wight is that it's close to other media and film production hubs in London and Bristol, yet it provides an amazing variety of locations - including beaches which could easily be mistaken for the Mediterranean, glorious country houses and period streets straight out of the Victorian era - yet it is only two hours from London. "Much closer than Cornwall!" said Linda.

Another Venture South project in partnership with Sarah Chatwin of EMRC and others is Sculpture South, which is designed to involve the whole island community and will hopefully lead to the development of a sculpture trail around the island, involving local and international sculptors.





Venture South/Sculpture South has also been gifted a bronze bell by the Time and Tide Bell Foundation, which is worth £50,000. The half bell, made of bronze, has already arrived on the island and there are plans to install it in Ventnor later this year, subject to the relevant permissions being granted. Community ambassadors from Ventnor, Phil Warren and Teresa Grimaldi, are working closely with Venture South on the project.

It will be a community project involving the Ventnor community and schools in the area and the half bell will be at St Catherine's School before its launch near the beach at Ventnor.

There are only a handful of these bells in locations around the UK at the moment, so it is a real coup to be awarded one. The bells are activated by the tide and apart from their distinctive sound and beauty, Time and Tide Bells make a comment on climate change and sea level rise which is allusive and metaphorical.

Further Venture South projects include branding the Isle of Wight in collaboration with various local entities and keeping a database of redundant buildings which could be repurposed.

Linda concluded: "We have a great team at Venture South who are giving their time and professional skills as volunteers to benefit everyone on the island. We want to create jobs and opportunities for people of all ages and we welcome ideas. We want to help broker projects and find investors to ensure great ideas come to fruition. It's all about forging initiatives and partnerships and creating sustainable entities - and I think that's very important for the Isle of Wight."

Venture South
venturesouth.org

Filmwight
filmwight.com

Sculpture South
sculpturesouth.com

Time And Tide Bell
timeandtidebell.org

