

## Lowestoft Enterprise Park

### **EEDA-funded units help fledgling businesses in an economically disadvantaged part of Suffolk**

#### Summary

Twelve light-industrial 'incubation' units have been built at Lowestoft Enterprise Park with funds provided jointly by EEDA and NWES (Norfolk and Waveney Enterprise Services). The units offer modern premises to local people who are either taking the first step into self-employment, or are already trading from home but need an independent base.

<b>County:</b>	Suffolk
<b>Programme:</b>	Economic participation
<b>Date:</b>	February 2008

#### Main messages

- EEDA jointly funded the 12 units through its Investing in Communities programme
- Creating modern premises for new or expanding local businesses
- Encouraging people in an economically disadvantaged part of Suffolk to try self-employment and stay in the area as their businesses grow
- Providing an environment where business advice is readily available from NWES
- Combating economic disadvantage through work and business opportunities.

#### Case study

##### **Units help Lowestoft couple take their business to the next level**

The run-up to Christmas can be a busy time for any company, but when your business is wicker baskets and gift basket supplies – mainly for the seasonal gifts trade – you really do have your work cut out. Lowestoft residents Catherine and Ian Mills run their company, Candi Gifts, from a unit at Lowestoft Enterprise Park (LEP) in Suffolk. It is one of 12 built during 2007 at the LEP site in School Road with joint funding from EEDA and NWES.

The new unit is the fourth the couple have rented through NWES since Candi Gifts began life at their home in Lowestoft in 2004, after which the business expanded rapidly. “We operated from home for about a year, trading mainly on e-Bay and at local markets, and we grew to the point where we needed to move the business somewhere bigger,” said Catherine. “We rapidly ran out of space because baskets are bulky items, and we’d basically filled up our front room and our garage. We also had big lorries reversing down our road to drop off.”

The couple approached NWES in the autumn of 2005 when it became obvious they needed their own premises. Eva Warner, who manages business units for NWES, found them a unit at the site in Pinbush Road, Lowestoft, which they moved into in January 2006. However, they quickly outgrew it, so Eva found them a larger one on the same site. After more sustained growth, she arranged a move to Unit 11 at School Road, one of the new units funded by EEDA. But first the company spent four months in another NWES unit at Quayside while the new one was finished.

The availability of these units in Lowestoft, one of the most economically deprived places in Suffolk, means that Candi Gifts, and other local companies like it, don’t have to look elsewhere for premises. This helps the Lowestoft economy, and should provide new jobs for local people as the businesses grow.

### **Trade nationally, grow locally**

“We moved in at School Road on 1 October, 2007, and it took us a while to get the telephones and IT systems set up,” said Ian. “The timing was not ideal, because we were already getting busy for Christmas, but we really did need the extra space. This one is much bigger and it’s got an office. In fact we’ve really got two units in one. I’ve had a door put between them, so we effectively have a double warehouse.”

Candi Gifts supplies national companies such as ASDA, Cadburys, the Co-op, Morrisons and Selfridges – as well as many small companies, sole traders, charities and voluntary groups – so Catherine and Ian need a lot of space for storage and preparation. “We were literally climbing over boxes to get to the things we wanted at the old unit,” said Catherine. The couple feel the new premises will further increase their credibility, and help them present a highly professional face to their customers.

After a lot of hard work, and with the help of NWES and EEDA, 2007 was the company’s most successful year to date. “Moving into LEP has been invaluable to us. We couldn’t have

coped over Christmas in smaller premises. At times we could have done with having the unit next door too!”

### **Advice is part of the package**

Catherine and Ian are grateful for the useful advice they have received from NWES over the years. “Eva has been really great and has supported us all the way,” said Catherine. “In fact, I think we would have struggled to get as far as we have without the units and the help of NWES. It is incredibly reassuring that the people we are dealing with are not just there to take the rent. They will also give us advice and back-up, and put us in touch with other businesses, such as printers, whose services we need.”

Now they are established at Unit 11, Catherine and Ian have further plans to expand the business. These will probably include taking on at least one member of staff to help with the huge volume of work that goes into fulfilling customer orders, particularly in the run-up to events such as Mothers’ Day, Easter and Christmas.

They also plan to offer training DVDs that will show other people how to fill, construct and wrap gift baskets. “It will benefit us,” said Catherine, “because if we show them how to make gift baskets to sell to their own customers, they are more likely to buy the basic materials from us. And from their point of view it is a great business for people who want to work from home, or to start up a new business without going straight into rented premises. We try to encourage small businesses and charities to take our goods, because it is a way for them to make money as well.”

Eva Warner, who is NWES senior co-ordinator, said: “We are delighted with Candi Gifts’ continued success. Catherine and Ian are among dozens of enterprising people that we have been able to help through the EEDA-supported development at LEP. We have long since recognised that new businesses need premises with flexible terms and the added comfort of someone to turn to for advice. It really comes down to helping people to help themselves, and the continued growth of Candi Gifts is a pleasant reminder that this is working.”

### **Getting people into business**

The 12 new incubator units at LEP together provide 15,000 sq ft of light industrial space for local businesses. They have been funded as part of EEDA’s Investing in Communities programme to enable individuals to participate in the region’s economy. EEDA and NWES

each provided half of the £1,250,000 cost of building the 12 new incubator units, which have been built to high environmental standards.

“These incubator units can be a vital springboard for people from economically disadvantaged parts of the region who need modern, affordable premises to start their own small business, or who are already trading from home or other non-commercial premises,” said Allison Conder, EEDA senior executive. “We have also approved funding for more similar units to be built during 2008 at the NWES Silkcutters House site, which is also in School Road, Lowestoft, so this is very much part of our ongoing programme to invest in schemes for creating new work opportunities.”

John Balch, property director for NWES, said LEP was designed specifically to help new businesses, and is particularly aimed at people who might otherwise struggle to start their own businesses. “In Lowestoft there are some areas of high deprivation, and NWES works with those people to nurture their entrepreneurial talents. We identified some time ago that there is a lack of very small but very high-spec units for people to start out in. We provide considerable added value because a tenant gets help with finance, training and business contacts included in their rent.”

## **Conclusion**

By helping to fund the new incubator units at Lowestoft Enterprise Park, EEDA is creating opportunities for people from an economically disadvantaged area of the East of England to explore self employment as a realistic option. It also enables them to stay in the area as their businesses grow.

## **Financial facts and figures**

- EEDA provided £625,000 through its Investing in Communities programme to joint fund the 12 incubator units at Lowestoft Enterprise Park.

## **Further information**

- Candi Gifts: [www.candigifts.co.uk](http://www.candigifts.co.uk)
- LEP / NWES: [www.nwes.org.uk](http://www.nwes.org.uk)

## About Investing in Communities (IiC)

The Investing in Communities fund is part of EEDA's Economic Participation programme to improve employability and increase economic opportunities for individuals unable to participate in the region's economy. EEDA sets the strategic priorities and objectives for the fund, and works with local decision-makers to identify local needs and direct funding into appropriate local solutions.

### Contact details

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