

Why Suffolk is perfectly located to capture a slice of film industry action

Having been a top TV producer in London, Rachel Aldridge knows better than most what it takes to run a successful shoot. **Jason Noble** caught up with her to find out how the film industry can thrive in Suffolk

As a producer and director for ITV Studios in London, Rachel Aldridge may have been forgiven for thinking that her work on top TV productions was over when she moved back to Suffolk.

But as last year's Screen Suffolk contract to bring TV, film, advert and photography shoots to the county took off, the 40-year-old has found herself back in the industry as a freelance location manager.

Growing up in Reydon, Mrs Aldridge moved to London for university, and remained there after graduating to work as a production runner. From there she worked her way up in the industry over a 10-year period to become a director and producer on hit shows such as *I'm A Celebrity...*, *Come Dine With Me* and *Britain's Best Dish*.

She left the big smoke behind in 2009 and relocated back to Suffolk to spend more time with her husband, Christian, and three young boys, but her talents remained in mind when it came to a London location company needing an experienced manager in Suffolk for its latest job – the video for Ed Sheeran's *Castle on the Hill*.

"One of my friends asked if I wanted some location scouting work and ended up getting in touch with Screen Suffolk just as they were starting," she said.

"They gave me a bit of location scouting and then they phoned me up about the Ed Sheeran job a week before it started.

"It was very exciting, just flying by the seat of my pants a bit because I had been out of the game for a while, but I got the head set right as a producer and director – I was always having to manage sets."

A natural fit for home-favourite Ed's homage to an upbringing in Framlingham, the rural idyll of sleepy Suffolk might not be the obvious choice for filming other projects. But its mix of coastline, airfields, forests and town centres



Ed Sheeran performs at the 59th Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. Looking across the mere to Framlingham Castle on a bright and sunny afternoon.

Pictures: ALLISON BALAAM/ KEVIN WINTER WIREIMAGE.COM

means it is ideally suited to the demands of multiple locations – a feature which is helping Suffolk set itself apart from the constructed sets of London.

"When things come up, living in Suffolk you don't know what's going on production-wise because everyone just sticks to London," Mrs Aldridge said.

"That's why Screen Suffolk are so great – they can be really proactive, saying I know someone in that role or that place."

The county may not be a stranger to big productions with the likes of the *Harry Potter* and *Fast and Furious* films having had scenes filmed here, but what Screen Suffolk is helping open doors to is the local knowledge, experience and expertise which is waiting to be discovered.

"I think there's a lot of talent

here that can step into roles in production," Mrs Aldridge said.

"That can save the London companies an absolute fortune in accommodation, and having people with local knowledge is key.

"You have to move from location to location with huge artics, and trying to find parking spaces in Rendham without local knowledge would be a nightmare."

On the Ed Sheeran shoot, the mum-of-three said locals recognising her helped make the production smoother, rather than just being another anonymous company, but perhaps more significantly it is helping to show the best of Suffolk's people as well as its landscapes.

She added: "The thing about filming here is everyone is very accommodating. London has had



Rachel Aldridge in Walberswick.

Picture: SARAH LUCY BROWN



Behind the scenes filming of the video for Ed Sheeran's Castle on the Hill.

Pictures: RACHEL ALDRIDGE



so much filming everyone is tired of it, and that's what all the London crew said – they couldn't believe how helpful everyone here was."

The drive to host industry shoots is also good news for colleges, schools and the university.

Screen Suffolk has voiced its intention to provide real hands-on work experience for those on film and media courses with an aspiration to get into the industry, and crucially could provide a trained professionals ready to work on productions in Suffolk when they finish their courses.

For Mrs Aldridge, she can continue her passion for production alongside her

family life and other part-time jobs running The Little Wooden Hut shop in Walberswick and the ferry.

"Giving me the opportunity to come back into the business is brilliant," she said.

"I am not in a position to go back and forth to London, and if Screen Suffolk can open up doors for people like me with a family background that used to be in production, that is very special.

"Suffolk is such an amazing place to live and film because there are so many different types of locations. You have Bentwaters, the urban areas of Lowestoft, coast, rural – it has everything really apart from mountains!"

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