



# ART IN PUBLIC PLACES: A STRATEGY FOR HALTON



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## Why have a Public Art Strategy?

Halton Borough Council has, over a number of years, developed a range of public artworks across the Borough (many of which engaged local communities in the development) but to date the work has been piecemeal and opportunistic, due to the lack of a coherent planned approach, a shared overall vision or a specialist to lead on this area of work.

Public artwork overlaps into urban design, community participation and regeneration. It can help generate pride in an area, increase a sense of place, and contribute to quality of life and with various major regeneration programmes ongoing, there are real opportunities to implement something creative and sustainable.

## The Background

With support from Arts Council North West, consultants were appointed to demonstrate how an Art in Public Places approach could be complementary to good urban design and community engagement and to identify the opportunities for projects across the Borough.

The work focuses on placing public art within the planning and regeneration development processes.

## SPECIFIC PROJECT SUGGESTIONS

The identification of specific live projects at an early-enough stage of development (and with amenable stakeholders) is seen as very important in the establishment of any integrated public art strategy across Halton. This section maps a number of key areas for consideration and investigations, and then looks at the central consolidation through marketing of a number of pilots acting as a multiple focus. Given the time constraints, this project list should not be seen as exhaustive however.

## Initial Pilot Cluster

Generally, the use of a rolling programme of artist placements and design team collaborations can be used throughout Halton's regeneration portfolio, with the individual areas developing their own particular piloted approach to suit particular development plans and client and community needs. To initiate this, it is suggested that the current programmes either side of the river at Widnes Waterfront and Castlefields provide an ideal joint marketing opportunity. Following on from these, other projects would be Halton Lea and Runcorn Old Town, both of who already have public art referred to in their draft SPD's, and are likely to reference in any future public art Guidance Note.

## Windows on the Waterfront

Complimenting these pre-existing 'live' projects, is a future relationship to other major programmes developed on the back of the 'Windows on the Waterfront' initiative from the Mersey Waterfront Regional Park - which has identified 11 key Mersey locations – or 'windows' as focal points for future development and investments. As part of this, the focus of the new Mersey Crossing (planned for completion in 2014) provides the ultimate flagship, and further makes the case for the development of a consolidated waterside strategy. Current identified opportunities within this developing Regional Park strategy include:

- Pride in our Promenades – Enhancing and extending public access along promenades
- Coastal Places, Open Spaces – Environmental improvements, interpretation, arts and access projects.
- Promoting the Place & Engaging People – Community engagement, marketing and communications, including 'Peoples' Panels' who will debate issues affecting their local waterfront area.
- Linking the Waterfront – Access and public transport links within the Regional Park Zone,

linking the 11 waterfront 'windows' with each other and surrounding parts of the Northwest.

- Mersey Way - Another long-term proposal is to create a continuous multi-user trail, making the entire 135km coastline fully accessible to the public by 2020.

Consolidating these in the medium to long term should be a major signed-up priority. There is clearly the need for some form of joined-up partnership or protocol operating between the different pilots - linking through to one centralised marketing and evaluation profile and identity, as well as the development of a growing artist network and training programme to draw upon. An enhanced role for a Halton wide Public Art Steering Group, although some form of additional facilitation would be required – be it consultancy in the short term and a new post in the longer term.

### **Mersey Crossing Gateways**

As well as projects directly related to both the old and new bridges themselves (such as public art lighting for example), allied to the wider Mersey Crossing project are a number of potential gateway sites – either associated directly with the bridges, or linked to the new and improved rail and road network that runs up to them. Potential locations, and preliminary gateway project ideas are as follows:

- Widnes Loops Junction gateway
- Mersey Crossing Visitor Centre – suggested off Widnes Loops Junction and located at South Widnes / Spike Island
- Tolling Plaza at Ditton Interchange
- Fiddlers Ferry Power Station public art lighting
- Landmark to south eastern tip of Wigg Island / Wigg Island Bridge
- Gateway to Astmoor Junction
- Gateway to Silver Jubilee South Junction / Runcorn Railway Station
- Central Gateway adjacent to Weston Link
- Major Southern Gateway to River Weaver / M56 Junction 12 (and possible collaborative project with Weaver Regional Park)

### **Widnes & West / South Bank**

In addition to key gateways, with regards to overall regeneration projects, on the Widnes side of the Mersey, it is suggested that the Mersey Waterfront consideration should include the Wards of Hale, Ditton, Riverside & Halton View. Key projects currently picked up in Action Plans here include:

#### **Halebanks**

Halebanks is currently an isolated residential area adjoining a mixed quality employment area, home to a variety of small businesses. There is a need for regeneration within the Area particularly in relation to the redevelopment of vacant and derelict sites, improving housing in the area, providing community facilities and improving the overall living and working environment. Halebanks opportunities include:

- Real opportunities for eco-village feel
- Lead artist placements in any masterplan teams to explore sustainable communities plan.
- Short-term creative reuse of Ditton Station / Long term creative industries or community part-use of redeveloped station building
- Environmental arts projects within woodland and greenway walkways and cycleway
- Other public transport related commissions and residencies

### **Southern Widnes**

Southern Widnes is the old Victorian heart of Widnes where an unhealthy mixture of heavy industry and poor quality housing has largely disappeared. The UDP directs large-scale retail and leisure development to the Town Centres and allocated sites. Therefore, any retail, food and drink or leisure provision within this Action Area should be to serve the local community only, in the interests of sustainability. The Action Plan concludes that is an area in need of investment in its social and physical environments. Southern Widnes opportunities include:

- Exploration of participatory and live-arts festivals, built around community engagement and tourism investment is needed.
- Water-based recreation explored in some way – perhaps water taxis along the Sankey to view the bridge and/or Houseboat pavilion design Competition
- That the design for a new railway station could provide both a design collaboration opportunity as well as possible community hub base – including creative industries.
- That the location of Spike Island provides the best location for a Mersey Crossing viewing station or visitor centre – with perhaps the opportunities of an international design competition being explored.
- Public realm projects exploring linkages along the waterfront and into Widnes core – and the Transpennine Trail.

### **Widnes Waterfront**

The declining employment area used to be a major location for the chemical industry in Widnes, leaving behind a legacy of contaminated land. The nature and design of new development should take advantage of the waterside location beside the St. Helens (Sankey) Canal and Mersey Estuary. The Action Plan concludes that a significant improvement should be made to the waterside environment. Widnes Waterfront opportunities include:

- The large and wide band of vacant land and the disused chemical tip, adjacent to the Mersey Estuary provide opportunities to explore a truly international environmental commission.
- The Tanhouse Lane intersection with the new greenway and riverside boulevard provide potential gateway points.
- The actual crossing of the Sankey Canal and Fright Line from Tanhouse Lane, provide a major design opportunity for some form of bridge crossing. Other crossing points also exist elsewhere.
- The development of a linear programme along Riverside Park – with immediate linkage to Spike Island, but beyond that linking into the Transpennine Trail, the Pride in our Promenades initiative and (in the long term) the planned Mersey Way.
- Collaborations with local businesses resident or relocating to the area.
- Artist residencies creating links to past and into Widnes town centre.
- Initial Landmark commission.

### **Runcorn & East / North Bank**

On the Runcorn side of the Mersey, it is suggested that the Mersey Waterside considerations should include the Wards of Heath, Mersey and Castlefields / Norton Priory and Daresbury. Key projects previously picked up in Action Plans here include:

#### **Castlefields / Norton Priory**

The Castlefields Regeneration Programme has been chosen as one of RENEW Northwest's five Exemplar Learning Projects for 2007. The Castlefields Partnership consists of Halton Borough Council, Liverpool Housing Trust, CDS Housing, Northwest Development Agency, The Housing Corporation and national regeneration agency, English Partnerships. The partnership is committed to working together to achieve lasting, sustainable improvements to Castlefields. This 3-year action plan includes over 50 projects. Within this, current Castlefields / Norton Priory opportunities include:

- New opened cycleway/pedestrian link through Castlefields.
- Phoenix Park, Youth Activity Park and drop-in centre
- Consultation events, including Party in the Park event, with environmental artists helping map opportunities.
- A commissioning project for treatment to 2 subways
- An arts competition for the refurbishment to new footbridge
- Artist placements within the redevelopment of existing Village Centre by McColl architects
- The developed strategy being passed on to developers coming into the area.

## **Runcorn & Weston Docklands**

Whilst Runcorn Docks continues as a freight handling facility, other parts of the area have been in decline due to increased carriage of goods by road. The legacy of previous uses includes large worn out buildings with few services, and large areas of derelict land. Provision is made for the commercial dock to continue and where possible enhanced; however should this not be commercially possible other compatible uses would be considered. Runcorn & Weston Docklands opportunities include:

- On an area of land adjoining the Dukesfield housing area there is an opportunity for building a new education building for Halton College. Alternatively this area would suit waterside housing.
- Advantage should be taken of the location of the Weaver Navigation within the area, both commercially and as a leisure and tourism facility – with possible collaborative links between the Mersey Waterfront and Weaver Valley Regional Parks.
- Public art interventions or architectural competitions built around the focus on Bridgewater House and the former Bridgewater Locks.

## **Runcorn Old Town Canal Quarter**

Architects Allford Hall Monaghan Morris (AHMM) have been selected by Urban Splash and Halton Borough Council to develop the £30m proposals for the four-hectare Canal Quarter site, which will transform Runcorn Old Town. AHMM have been working up proposals for the site, which has included further consultation with local people, to prepare a planning submission for an exciting mix of bars, shops, apartments and offices.

## **Links to Other Strategic Live Projects**

Taking this further, such potential artist commissioning should be built around actual 'live' capital projects, currently planned (or aspired to) as part of the wider regeneration, and collaborating with selected (and amenable) design teams. Projects need to be engaged as early as possible (but ideally pre-planning) and include:

- Building Schools for the Future programme (Wave 6) - indicative capital investment estimated to be in the region of £90m to £100m, with Halton likely to replace or refurbish its secondary school provision. These currently include the 8 secondary schools, 3 special schools offering secondary provision and 2 Pupil Referral units offering secondary provision.

## **Other Generic Areas of Opportunity**

Many projects that link into the overall Strategic Frameworks could be engaged either directly or indirectly through a collaborative arts approach. Typical core themes, include:

- River footpath / cycleway / countryside linkages – possible links to Sustrans and their 'Art in the Travelling Landscape' community programme.
- Related projects built around the notions of 'Exercise, Exploration and Fresh Air' – Exploratory projects to get out on the streets, parks and greenways to investigate and engage with the surroundings and community.

- Green Space Projects – Neighbourhood green and park art projects and strategic linkage explore with stakeholders Cabe Space and Groundworks.
- Project links to Halton parks holding the prestigious Civic Trusts 'Green Flag Award' - Rock Park, Wigg Island Community Park, Runcorn Hill Park and Local Nature Reserve, Victoria Park, Hough Green Park and Pickerings Pasture Local Nature Reserve.
- Public Transport / Bus Operators – development of artist placements alongside transport providers.
- Housing & Street Layouts – Artist residency projects to work with design teams to investigate the physical design of the streetscape.
- Live and participatory arts commissions within identified Halton wards to develop their aspiration as a cultural and leisure amenity with evening activities.
- Safe and Secure Neighbourhoods – Links to Street Warden Scheme and Neighbourhood Police schemes – collaborative artist residencies and linkage, with particular emphasis on engaging anti social behaviour and health / drugs issues
- Links to local businesses - collaborations and residencies to embed the programme and create buy-in.
- Education & Training programmes - through both Artist and Creative Industry educational programmes but also CPD for professionals.
- Business Development programmes allied to Creative Industries.
- Community / adult learning generally
- Public Realm Design awareness programmes – linked through collaborative residencies to designated Design Teams, Stakeholders and community groups
- General programmes built around issues to do with Sense of Place, Local history and Memory – but with very much a forward-looking project focus of aspiration.

### **Artists Taking The Lead**

The London Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games has announced a formal role for the funded arts sector in a Cultural Olympiad. As such, all four Arts Council's will be asked to support something called 'Artists Taking the Lead', through which artists will be challenged to lead a celebration of the excellence, diversity, innovation and internationalism of the arts across the UK. As a part of this, twelve artists' commissions – presumably public art in some form - will be "responding to and celebrating our local and national cultural life in each of the nine English regions and in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales" and will create "great art in iconic and unexpected places". Each commission will encourage collaboration across art forms, aspire to a legacy beyond 2012, and have the creative energy of children, young people and communities at its heart.

With this in mind, 8 Creative Programmers have already been appointed so far by DCMS for the Cultural Olympiad – including one for the North West.

### **ACTION PLAN**

#### **Specific Project Suggestions**

Immediate project recommendations could look to particularly to engage with existing Partnership Stakeholders (either collaboratively, or as part of a joined-up cluster) through a series of centrally marketed pilot projects.

In the short term, these pilots should concentrate around Widnes waterfront and Castlefields; in the medium term around Runcorn Old Town and Halton Lea; and in the longer term around other Action Areas as identified above – but with particular emphasis being towards the Mersey Crossing, and all the connective networks of transportation and Borough profile that can be planned-in around that between now and 2016.

### **SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM SUGGESTIONS**

Short to medium term programme suggestions are highlighted in this section.

Of course there is a strong argument for a project-based approach to public art commissioning but whilst this provides an interesting diversity of project approaches, it also acts as a divide and rule mechanism to maintain the piece-meal approach to commissioning.

What is needed is a consolidated joined-up approach that both identifies the need to bridge a number of issues – be they project and stakeholder collaboration, new creative and learning networks, or indeed increased linkage between Runcorn and Widnes – with the Mersey Crossing as the flagship to that.

### **Generic Recommendations**

Integral to any *Art in Public Places* strategy for Halton should be a fundamental sign-up to the aspirational development of the core principles of welcoming:

- Development of exemplar Public Art cluster projects with diverse artists, partners and communities
- A joined up approach to ‘bridge’ Halton and focus on creative programmes to readdress the Waterfront and Widnes / Runcorn relationship.
- Centralised Advocacy and Marketing strategies and budgets
- Innovation, Risk, Experimentation
- Critical Debate and Advocacy Processes
- Appropriate and Robust Processes
- Skills and Capacity building between artists, clients and professionals
- Research and Development - including paid design time for artists and other creatives
- Embedded documentation and evaluation programmes

### **Proposed Short Term Actions 2009 - 2010**

It is suggested that to kick off the Guidance Note and a related marketing and advocacy profile is developed for the two separately funded public art clusters of Widnes Waterfront and Castlefields. As such, critically it will be the need to influence future brief development and to establish in the minds of the client body, the value that the role of artists can provide. In the medium term, projects such as Runcorn Old Town and Halton Lea should be targeted, along with other ones as identified in Section 11. In simple terms, the most practical way this can be achieved is by:

- Detailed debate and engagement with all stakeholders.
- Setting up a wider Working Group cluster, based on existing exemplar projects and partners.
- Expansion of the terms of the Public Art Steering Group.
- Initiating a wider facilitated creative forum or workshop with invited stakeholders, practitioners and community representation.
- Establishment of agreed core Partnership Aims and Objectives to Public Art – that are adopted in a Public Art Guidance Note.
- Commission a further detailed Delivery Action Plan either in-house or by consultant commission – informed by the Steering Group.
- Creation of funding pots to enable both a centralised public art advocacy and marketing strategy, and to create initial project feasibility.
- Resulting from the Action Plan, set aside portion of existing budget for the Steering group to help agree seed-funding feasibilities of new residency programmes with identified stakeholders.
- Marketing & Evaluation budgeted for, established and programmed
- Regular funding bids budgeted for, established and programmed

### **Proposed Medium Term Actions 2009 - 2011**

In the Medium-Term the emphasis should be to look to begin to embed more strategic and sustainable practices. Following successful stakeholder discussions and funding bids, it should be possible to begin to grow the range of the commissioning and residency programme, whilst still keeping the funding and delivery of these within their individual project frameworks. To augment that however, is the need for a centralised fund to act as a hub for these public art project clusters, and enables it to buy-in stakeholders, cross boundaries, seed-fund new feasibility and jointly market and evaluate ongoing projects. As such, suggested outputs are:

- The creation of a curatorial and/or project manager role in support of the Arts Development Officer, Planning or Regeneration Teams.
- Continued quarterly facilitation of the Public Art Steering Group
- Establishment of a wider Public Art forum that includes all interested stakeholders.
- Continuation of recurring Network Events and Workshops - to enable participants to understand and develop awareness of the diverse stakeholder influences on their organisations. Presentations and facilitation would include artists, as well as wider design teams.
- Top up to the funding pot to enable small public art feasibility development.
- Establishment of a Section 106 / % For Art or new Planning Tariff drawdowns to feed into the non-project fund.
- Negotiation of Stakeholder Service Level Agreement to secure further Public Art investment.
- Establishment of a formal public art policy through SPD or other means following consultation.
- Using ongoing management of projects, begin to investigate potential new stakeholders and other funding streams to develop new project feasibilities.
- Set up a regular on-line bulletin or website be commissioned to which Stakeholder organisations are invited to contribute any issues they wish to disseminate and debate.
- Continue to seed-fund feasibilities for new programmes
- Build on marketing budget and look to produce a joined-up marketing programme of publications and new media – including a regular on-line bulletin or website commissioned. Stakeholder organisations to be invited to contribute any issues they wish to disseminate and debate information and list opportunities.
- Evaluate existing and new programmes using the new Ixia Open Space Evaluation Toolkit (with nominated Officers trained to use this system).
- Following successful stakeholder discussions and funding bids begin to grow the range and scope of the commissioning programme.

### **Long- term Suggestions - 2011 - 2016**

Looking to the longer-term sustainability of any integrated public art programme within Halton, this section sets out some of the ultimate programmes that could be possible up to the end of the UDP in 2016.

### **Suggested Programme Considerations**

In the Long-Term, start to feed-back the (hopefully) ongoing programme of arts engagement activity, such as:

- Final delivery of a major permanent public art commission and related festivals programme allied to the completion of the Mersey Crossing, Mersey Way and Mersey Waterfront Regional Park – envisaged in 2015.
- Development of a self-sustaining and ongoing public art programme and cluster-based delivery strategy as part of a wider Art in Public Places in Halton.
- Creation and funding of a permanent public art delivery model or agency – including permanent posts.
- Establishment of a Section 106, new Planning Tariff and Service Level Agreement and other grant and stakeholder revenue and project streams.
- Provision of support and advocacy for Stakeholders to understand and manage creative



opportunities in Halton more fully.

- Establishment of Action Learning and Community Engagement programmes to enable Stakeholders to continue to learn from one another using a process that promotes sustainability and “cross-fertilisation” of creative ideas and experiences.
- Support and ongoing use of empirical research and evaluation in public art.
- Support the development and delivery of short, tailored CPD programmes for artists and providers.
- Continuation, improvement and additional programmes to short and medium term.

## **Long Term Legacy**

In many ways, the commissioning, action research and advocacy carried out in years 2009 to 2011, as well as any support consultancies or posts created to help facilitate it, will determine the potential scope and sustainability of any long-term programme.

There is no doubt that stand-alone project funding for public art programmes are generally easier to achieve than more elaborate long-term funds for centralised support – and needing complex in-house officer or agency support. That is not to say it is impossible, merely that a strong argument has to be made to potential funding stakeholder, and that it needs to be backed up by clear evaluated data that needs to be collected right from the start.