

A brief introduction to London Fieldworks practice

London Fieldworks was co-founded in 2000 by artists Bruce Gilchrist and Jo Joelson. LFW's practice oscillates between east London studio and the landscape and recently urban green spaces too.

We describe our projects as engaging with ecology – the notion of ecology as a complex interworking of social, natural and technological worlds.

Over the last decade or so we have been exploring our relationship with the natural world and projects have been inspired by field-based research and residencies undertaken in a number of remote sites in Brazil, North East Greenland, Northern Norway, and Scotland.

In our work narrative, truth, fiction, scientific data and hypotheses, life stories and ecological histories are intertwined – hopefully in productive and socially pragmatically useful ways.

The outputs we create include installation, moving image works and architecture. Recently we have been exploring concepts of “performative architecture”, by creating platforms and opportunities for humans and animals in rural and urban green spaces.

Examples include: *Outlandia*, an artists field station in Glen Nevis, Scotland created in collaboration with Malcolm Fraser Architects, and commissioned by Highland Council, 2010.

Super Kingdom, a series of animal show homes modeled on dictators palaces and created in collaboration with Consarc Architects - commissioned by Stour Valley Arts, Kings Wood, Kent 2008.

Spontaneous City in the tree of heaven, a series of birdhouses drawing on the local architecture - of the Worlds End Estate Chelsea, - Georgian town houses and 60's social housing in Islington – commissioned by Up Projects.

And *Spontaneous City* commissions for Norfolk and Norwich Festival and Clerkenwell Design Week.

A perspective on the current project

Putton Lane site – Chickerell, Dorset

In September 2009 London Fieldworks were commissioned to develop a public art proposal for the public spaces of a new housing scheme at Chickerell in Dorset. The project is a partnership between Dorset Design and Heritage Forum and housing developer C G Fry and Sons and the R&D phase of the commission took place between September 2009 and April 2010.

The key themes of the project are heritage/ecology and intergenerational space.

The site is challenging in terms of its ecological and archaeological significance. The land, known to many locals as the top part of the rough field between Putton Lane and Lower Putton Lane, is the site of the medieval village of Putton – a barely visible earthwork hints at its footprint. The developers CG Fry have stated in their plans that this land should be public open space.

Whilst the area is positively framed by the new development and has good linkage to the rest of the settlement, within the brief there was concern that the archaeological site could become little more than “a sterile green carpet or dog walking area and its significance lost on both the new and existing community”.

We saw this as an opportunity for a novel approach to the treatment, interpretation, understanding and enjoyment of this space beyond the usual footpaths, interpretation boards and dog waste bins. We wanted to explore ecological opportunities and ways to reference the archaeological significance.

A survey report of the site identified habitats suitable for roosting and foraging bats, dormouse, badger, great crested newt, and reptiles such as slow worms. With the presence of many species we set out to think of ways we could encourage further biodiversity on the site – whilst also providing a recreational space that would appeal to Chickerell's inhabitants.

We carried out site visits, visited local schools and organised an informal drop-in day at the local village hall to gauge the communities response to our proposals. Dorset Community Action, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Dorset Ecological Consultancy and Dorset County Council members were also consulted.

Firstly we proposed forming a growing group to create a wildflower meadow on the site. The Growing Group would aim to attract local people of different ages, from schoolchildren to retired folks. Activities would include harvesting seeds from local sites, site preparation, seeding and maintenance.

Secondly we proposed an architectural intervention within the wildflower meadow that would communicate the archaeological significance of the site. A timber frame structure of a medieval building would be constructed on the site and appear to be sinking into or emerging from the ground as a way of symbolizing the social and cultural past of the site. The partially submerged nature of the building alludes to that which has been lost to the collective memory of the extant community. As a parallel idea the perspective of an emerging structure could be interpreted as a renewal of awareness of local history.

As well as having symbolic value for Chickerell residents and visitors for the area, the structure - proposed as an open social structure could function as a meeting place, as a site for recreation, as a place of interest to facilitate study of the site's history and the ecology of the site.

This project is currently awaiting the go ahead from planners.