

PUBLIC ART – WHY BOTHER?!!

Art and the Community: What does an Artist Bring?

Wide Open Spaces – Dorset Developers

3rd March 2011

Good evening – it's a pleasure to be here and to be part of this interesting event and talk to the people who are at the coalface of delivering developments and have a chance to really discuss what it is that public art can bring to your work in terms of benefits.

In times of restraint it is important that every penny counts but it is equally true that necessity is the motherhood of invention – and that creativity and innovation come to the fore when the pressure is on. Therefore this is precisely the time when lateral thinking and new ways of working help provide the edge in a highly competitive market.

But before I go on I want to clarify what we mean by contemporary public art practice. The term refers to artists and craftspeople working within the built, natural, urban or rural environment. It aims to integrate artists' and craftspeople's skills, vision and creative abilities into the whole process of creating new spaces and regenerating old ones, in order to imbue the development with an unique quality and to enliven and animate the space by creating a visually stimulating environment.

Public Art is not an artform. It's a principle, a principle of improving the changing environment by involving artists in the conception, development and transformation of a public space. It is specifically commissioned for a known site and its audience is the public or community, be it social or working, who occupy that space.

There is no simple definition of public art:

- It may be incorporated within a building's structure or result in the creation of new architectural spaces, new public spaces, landscaping (hard and soft), fencing, brickwork, glasswork, gates, grilles, windows, lighting treatments, seating, play areas/structures, carved lettering and plaques.
- It may take the form of tapestries, carpets, weaving, textiles, hangings, banners, use of colour, mobiles, ceramics, tiling, interior lighting, signage, and flooring.
- It could be sculpture, landmarks, environmental land works, photography, prints, paintings, projection, moving images, computer generated images, performance, events, music commissions etc.
- It can introduce narrative or text, be issued based, decorative, humorous, challenging, beautiful, subtle or contentious.
- It may refer to our heritage or celebrate the future, highlight specific areas and issues or be conceptual. Work can be permanent or temporary, internal or external, integral or free standing, monumental or domestic, large or small scale, design or ornament.
- And it does not have to be publicly funded to be public art! Many think this is the case but the truth is that the majority of public art commissions arise from private sector development and investment, or are supported by charitable institutions. Relatively few are commissioned entirely from the public purse.

The modern public art movement as we now know it, really started in the 1930's in the United States and arose from a funding mechanism - percent for art – which is when an amount for public art activity is allocated from the capital budget of a project. The movement grew in popularity and now throughout the United States, and in Australia, New Zealand and much of Europe, percent for art is mandatory. And, increasingly places like India, Africa, the Middle East and across Eastern Europe, public art activity is being encouraged and developed as a way of celebrating cultural heritage and diversity and bringing quality and confidence to the public realm.

But in Britain percent for art is voluntary and negotiated as part of planning permission via Section 106 agreements. And whilst the future of percent for art is uncertain as CIL's start to become more widely used, the value and quality public art activity brings – remains the same.

Over the years a great deal of evidence has been collated about the benefits, financial and social that arts led regeneration brings.

Public Art is widely recognised as having a broad range of benefits including:

- Environmental - regeneration, creation of a sense of place, identity
- Economic - encourages inward investment, promotes a sense of confidence and positivity
- Social - promotes civic and personal pride, encourages people to rediscover and interact with their environment, social inclusion tool
- Cultural - community development tool, raises the profile of the arts in general, offers opportunities for people to participate in the arts

Many projects around the country have aided regeneration both geographical and social through the promotion of civic pride and the creation of a sense of place, an identity, and encouraged inward investment through the impression of social, cultural and economic confidence.

Public art encourages the public to look at and interact with their environment in a new way developing a sense of ownership, local identity, personal and civic pride. It helps to create and promote local distinctiveness.

With community involvement these benefits are especially evident. Opportunities for learning, development of creative skills and broadening the understanding of the arts result from community involvement and provide a sense of ownership and pride in the piece and the space. This encourages people to value their environment contributing to a reduction in vandalism.

When public art is part of a development it is a tool for community development and social inclusion. A well-managed public art project has the potential to bring communities together, allowing them to make decisions and contribute to the development of the artwork.

CABE, English Partnerships and the Regional Development Agencies were all supporters of integrating artists as part of the design team. CABE in particular championed this through the support of a national scheme I ran, which was funded in partnership with Arts and Business – called PROJECT - engaging artists in the built environment.

The scheme aimed to create a shared vision for public space, planning and high quality urban design and engage artists, public agencies and the private sector in projects that would have a positive impact on the places in which we live. It supported the involvement of the artist as a creative thinker who was brought in right at the beginning of the concept and design process.

Many developers and housebuilders were involved including Grosvenor Ltd, Gallagher Estates, Elevate East Lancashire Housing Pathfinder, AMEC, Sovereign Housing, Cala Homes and Ashwell Property Group.

Independent evaluation was commissioned from Comedia and whilst too detailed to go into now – there is one aspect of it that I would like to highlight. The question was asked of all participants:

Had the involvement of artists made a demonstrable difference to projects?

The findings demonstrated that there was a wide appreciation amongst the other professionals that the engagement of artists had raised the quality and value in the project and in the built environment that ultimately ensued. The range of discourse between developers, architects, planners and clients had been beneficially extended by the artists' intervention and the engagement of residents and potential users had been facilitated by the artists' presence and work. Interestingly the most enthusiastic of the professionals involved were the Developers – who felt the involvement of the artist had helped clarify the aims of the development, engaged the community far more effectively and meaningfully than it would otherwise have been, and smoothed the whole process along. In addition the Developer's expectations of innovative design input and a new response to design challenges were fulfilled in several cases, similarly the looked for benefit to the developer's relationship with the planners was achieved in several cases. And where the artist was well integrated into the development team, their input had a cross –fertilising effect, enabling fresh thinking, ideas and approaches to be generated and explored between the other professionals involved.

CABE through their work into the value of design has also established that value works on a variety of levels, and that as well as measuring success via exchange and use value, it is important to understand the contribution that social and cultural value also makes. Their last piece of work prior to being incorporated into the Design Council, focussed on the importance of beauty within our environments. And their research demonstrated that the majority of people valued and expected beauty to be part of their surroundings and furthermore, felt it was the Local Authorities' responsibility via the planning process – to deliver it.

This also backs up previous research from the University of Westminster in the late nineties – that commercial developments which had incorporated public art, had the edge, in a competitive market, and were more likely to obtain full occupancy.

So onto a few examples. Time doesn't allow me to go into much detail but they provide a flavour of what can be achieved.

The first is quite an old project now but one which very successfully linked the place to the new development. In 1995 Middlesbrough Football Club played their last competitive match at Ayresome Park.

When the club moved out of the stadium there was room for over 100 houses to be built where the pitch and stands had been. As part of the process of creating the new housing estate the artist Neville Gabie was commissioned, in 2000, by Wimpy Homes and Cleveland Arts to 'mark' the site. A very small budget of £22,000 was provided by Wimpy homes.

Retracing the exact position of the pitch, the stand and other elements over the new estate, Gabie 'remarked' specific locations with several subtle interventions which revealed interesting relationships between past and present: Looking like it has just been left behind in someone's front garden, a bronze football marks the penalty spot; a pair of bronze boots, permanently installed next to someone's front door, marks the location of the centre- spot of the old ground, but equally looking as if they had been recently removed before entering., Elsewhere stainless steel studs set into the tarmac of driveways mark the touchlines and centre circle, and a bronze scarf and bronze jumper mark two of the corner flags. The words AWAY and ENCLOSURE are sandblasted into brick boundary walls which were once the location of the 'Boy's Enclosure' a small section of the former ground reserved for children. There is even a reminder in the form of a bronze pitch puddle covered in stud marks from where Pak Do Ik struck his match-winning goal for North Korea in the victory over Italy in the 1966 World Cup (apparently, this is now a National Historic Monument in North Korea!)

Sixteen years on, despite the work appearing to be quite vulnerable, it is all intact and probably the best maintained of any of the artist's projects. He thinks this is due to the sense of individual guardianship the works have evoked, and their location on or close to private homes. Although the artist started when the development in the last phase of construction, which is not ideal, he was able to make a difference to how the community perceived the new estate. He said that there was much more interest and potential to make more things if he had been involved earlier.

In 2005 work commenced on a major new settlement north of Cambridge called Arbury Camp and latterly Orchard Park. A partnership between Gallagher Estates and South Cambridgeshire District Council , a range of housebuilders were subsequently involved including Wimpy, Persimmon and Laing. It is a development that some would regard as the size of a small town, or at least a pretty substantial village. Prior to it arriving on the plot there had been no built settlement in the area and the clients made a

decision very early on that it wanted the development to be much more than a collection of dwellings and aspired to it coming into the world as a fully functioning community. And in order to do this, it should have an integrated programme of public art which would establish a sense of place from the outset. So the lead artist Patricia MacKinnon-Day came up with the concept of making visible the invisible. Her job, she said, was to come up with an arts strategy for the site and in order to inform her work she researched the areas around the site, looking at the social, historical and political aspects of the community.

She explored the area's industries such as Unwins Seeds and Chivers Jams and Jellies, and looked at the history of work and social activity in the area including the strong tradition of traveller's who would come to work on the farms. The work she ultimately proposed included: a play area, with the equipment based on jellies and their moulds, a large light piece for the centre of Orchard Park that was based on the seed trial beds, textworks that included old recipes used by Chivers that would be placed onto large slabs in the play area and a glass library installed in one of the buildings that housed the archaeological finds of the site.

She also led on the Public Art Strategy and developer's guidance, both of which were fully adopted and which required all developers to demonstrate how they would involve artists in the design of individual sites and dwellings and in particular commission works of art which were integral to the development. It specified that artists' involvement should be planned at the earliest possible stage, demonstrate a commitment to quality, best practice and community consultation; and demonstrate consideration of the full public art strategy.

In addition the work commissioned by artists should be informed by the rich social and cultural histories of the site and should continue to explore the archives and reference centres around Cambridgeshire, exposing the hidden and concealed and often ordinary aspects of the place. Her involvement resulted in a considered and highly relevant approach to involving artists in the ongoing development of the new settlement and the programme is ongoing, with many more commissions undertaken and a publication was produced which documents the whole process. A Park Arts Group has been formed and I think the following quote from one of the resident's sums up the value of this long term project:

'The art is an incredibly important part of this process, I freely admit that earlier, I hadn't thought much of the plan to include public art in the development. What use could it possibly have? Now, although Orchard Park remains in some ways the same place as it was nearly two years ago when I first moved in, I think that the art has been instrumental in breathing the first signs of life into what and to Orchard Park acquiring a sense of itself and of course too many more years watching a new urban community being forged in front of our eyes.'

In the autumn of 2008 the North Sheffield Regeneration Team put together a document for the redevelopment of areas known as Parson Cross and Foxhill. It had three broad aims:

- To involve and engage individuals and communities in the shaping of their environment
- To establish a unified 'journey' through the area whilst preserving individual character
- To make the place unique, special and exciting – a place where existing residents, new residents and visitors want to be

They invited expressions of interest from artists/ artist teams with expertise in landscape and urban regeneration and following a shortlisting and interviewing process, appointed artists Scott Farlow and Antony Lyons to help us deliver stage 1 of the project- producing a strategy for how public space in the two areas will look and feel in the future.

The artists involved local people and community organisations to produce a 'vision' for creating places that are special and linked together, building on the rich history, strong communities and great views in Parson Cross and Foxhill, and which would positively shape the future of the areas, helping to create a thriving place that people feel proud of, own and enjoy.

This vision included looking at how communal gardens, orchards and food growing; green routes and gateways; viewing points and public art works can help to create and link open spaces together, forming 'green ribbons' across the two areas. The rationale being to form networks that tie together new and existing public spaces and connect places together , thus creating continuity. Green Ribbons are about involving the community, to create a sense of ownership of spaces (expressing commitment). They are also about developing the sense of enjoyment in the area as people navigate around interesting and visually appealing open spaces (promoting celebration). They are now embarking on designing and delivering aspects of the Stage 2 projects- improved entrances to Parson Cross Park and an enhanced public realm at Chaucer Public Square.

The waymarker elements are to be fabricated shortly for Parson Cross Park and will be a combination of materials including steel, vitreous enamel, reclaimed timber and cast iron. In addition an artist team has been commissioned to engaging with local people in order to bring a community focus and creative direction to the design and delivery of the streetscene changes and to enable community participation in the process.

Grosvenor Waterside is a large riverside development lead by Berkeley Homes subsidiary St.James with the architecture practice Make designing the buildings. Bramah House and Woods House, are the most recently completed.

MAKE needed a solution to Bramah House's huge expanse of reflective metal, which Westminster City Council were worried might be too blinding or distracting unless broken up. They appointed the artist Clare Woods, a painter, at a very early stage, who took inspiration from photos taken of the surrounding buildings, railway, dock and trees, in order to unlock the character of the place. These were turned into drawings, blown up in scale and then transposed onto the facade through a process of etching onto its anodised aluminium panel. Dressed in this two-tone panelling, the work literally wraps the building and responds to changes of natural light as it hits different areas on its surface throughout the day.

Highly visible to the millions of passengers using nearby Victoria Station, the work is visually stunning and fully meets the developers aspirations which were to have embedded arts programme which ensured cohesion with the surrounding environment. The balustrades are also Woods' design, devised from the Georgian heritage of the area and the way they used a thin metal structure for balconies almost like a drawn line, which echoed the artists' drawing process. The residents who were known for being very vocal about anything they didn't like, have had no problem with this scheme and in fact really value the quality and interest it brings. There are many, many more projects which I could refer to and I am happy to direct anyone to sources of information should they wish.

Culture and creativity can be a binding force bringing people and urban space together. Through animation and activity new urban development's become more attractive to live in and companies like: Allied London, Barratt London, Berkeley Homes, Ballymore Properties, British Land, Countryside Properties, Durkan Estates, First Base, Hines, Linden Homes, Land Securities Liberty Property Trust, Miller Homes, Minerva PLC, Peel Holdings, St James, Taylor Wimpey and Treasury Holdings have all been active in commissioning and working with artists and view commissioning artists as a long-term investment that can build real places through activity and animation, offer authenticity and ultimately raise values.

The key messages to take away are that you must involve an artist early on in the process and also look to engage specialist knowledge and help. As quality is paramount and you need guidance with regard to which artists will be capable of and want to engage in the process in a truly collaborative way. The local authority you are dealing with will also want to be assured that you have approached the task of

integrating public art in a way which demonstrates best practice, and not just opted to commission the first artist you come across to design something for the entrance to the site. In this way the programme will become an important and integral component of place making, not just an add-on that doesn't appear to bring any added value, other than fulfilling an obligation.

Taking a more informed approach will also be highly beneficial when seeking partnership funding. If approaching the Arts council or any major trust or charity you will need to demonstrate a commitment to quality and an financial investment in securing this – no funding body wishes to fund art for arts sake – what they are looking for are ways of establishing new and sustainable partnerships and supporting projects which have a real relevance to both the stakeholders and the community.

and in the words of Hastings Borough Council –

'Public art is an important tool for creating successful communities and places. It has a role to play in public business and residential areas. The past decade has seen a renaissance of activity and interest in public art that has been driven by a new urban regeneration agenda. The message is clear: public art aids urban regeneration and has the unique ability to bring together social, economic and physical aspects of urban improvement'

And finally a word about localism.....The emphasis on removing central decision making and empowering local communities to be the authors of their own destinies – brings many challenges – not least in terms of being able to convey the bigger picture and to understand the consequences of local decisions on a regional and national scale. There is a great deal of capacity building which will need to be undertaken in order to equip neighbourhood's and subsequent plans with the expertise and knowledge necessary to make appropriate decisions and investment. One area in particular where artists excel at and which would be highly beneficial to developers – is that of genuine community engagement. Lateral thinking and creative ways of involving and working with communities will be necessary and there are many examples where an intuitive and thoughtful programme has reaped benefits for all concerned.

For example, a project with a very direct approach to locations for consultation took place in north London. The artist Nayan Kulkarni and architect Andrew Siddall worked on a project to design a new Homezone and Green Space for the Ringcross estate. They began a relationship of discussion and consultation in the kitchen of the Chairperson of the local Tenant's Association. Other "kitchen conversations" followed, until the process began to be opened up through design workshops in the

community centre and local school. Use of virtual reality technology based on computer games has also given increased means of access to the design development.

Where commissions are an integral part of a new development, the site itself can act as a consultative location. Andrew Sabin, worked as lead artist on the Horsebridge project in Whitstable, Kent, carrying out temporary work on the development site which acted as a springboard for consultation. The "History Wall", made from products of the demolition work on site, acted as part of the site perimeter, with the rest of the hoardings emblazoned with the art project's website address. Entries on the website's forum and letters to the local paper showed a fierce variety of reactions both to the temporary work and to the development itself.

There are a huge variety of methods which can be used depending on the type of consultation and the type of project it is linked to. But what is clear is that the more successful consultation gets to people in a direct, imaginative and often participative way, and in all cases, the earlier on in the project the better.

Using artists' work purely as consultation itself is illustrated by the project "A Splash of Colour" - a programme of artist-led consultation in Saltley and Small Heath, Birmingham. This was co-ordinated by the architects Shillam and Smith, who decided to work with a programme of temporary commissions as part of the initial community consultation on a regeneration scheme. The community was very diverse with a large Muslim population and it was hard to reach the women, who were unable to mix with men in open meetings. Therefore to draw them out of their houses onto the open, rather run down play area, the artist David Cotterrell made a temporary geyser. The first day it went off with no warning – about four metres high and caused a real stir – the second day it went off at the same time and on the third day a crowd had gathered in anticipation and it created a great focus for discussion and starting point to make people think about how their open spaces could be used.

I hope that this rather brief run through of activity and benefits has demonstrated that there are sound commercial reasons to work creatively with artists and that in answer to the rather tongue in cheek 'why bother' in my title – it is clear that whatever our areas of expertise – our interests all **boil down to the same thing – better, more interesting places for people to live, work and play - as when people are based in or visit environments which are well designed, creative and fit for purpose – they tend to thrive.**

Thank you.

MBA.march2011