

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Public Art Strategy

Summary and Recommendations

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1. Introduction and Methodology

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council's Cultural Strategy, 'Making Culture Count', states that the Borough's vision is 'to be recognized as the cultural capital of the East of England by 2010'.

This document makes the case for a Public Art Strategy which is integral to the Borough's social and economic development, and challenges negative perceptions of Southend.

The Public Art Strategy responds to the opportunities offered through current funding programmes, the Thames Gateway project and the commitment of the Arts Council to regeneration.

The strategy has been informed by a wide range of comparators, extensive consultation and focus group discussions.

Major issues identified in the consultation process included the importance of context, the value of wide-ranging consultation, and the need for a robust strategy championed by the Council.

2. Context

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council: Current and Past Activity

There has been limited public art activity to date in the Borough in spite of commitment amongst officers and Members.

The Borough Council has initiated a number of important architectural commissions, and these create a precedent for developing an innovative programme of public art.

Focal Point Gallery and the Leigh Art Trail have promoted public art projects as part of their programmes, providing a precedent for the future development of public art in the Borough.

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council was one of five regional partners who received substantial funding from Arts Council England East as part of the Art Generate programme, making the case for ambitious and innovative arts activities as part of the regeneration process.

'Lifelines' by Clare Obussier and Vong Phoaphanit commissioned for Pier Hill generated substantial funding from a range of external sources.

Southend is one of the sites for the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership's 'Art In Open Spaces' project for 2006-2007.

3. Regional and National Context: Comparator Projects

A range of comparator projects were identified where public art has been used as a development agent.

- Chatham and Medway's strategic vision utilises public art as an integral part of the regeneration process. A commitment to high profile artists and community involvement has resulted in a far reaching programme which has attracted substantial funding from the National Lottery.
- Bristol has undertaken an ambitious programme of improvements to the city centre. Castle Park, the Harbour area and Colston Hall have all involved artists. One of the most ambitious projects, Legible City, is a major city wide public art project which is contributing to people's understanding and experience of Bristol. These projects have helped develop Bristol as a major tourist destination.
- Eastbourne and Brighton have taken different approaches to involving public art into urban design. Whereas a substantial body of work has been commissioned as part of Brighton's seafront regeneration, Eastbourne has taken a more measured approach with public art as an integral part of the urban design process.
- North Norfolk District and Waveney District Council have commissioned public art as part of seafront regeneration schemes. Waveney has commissioned a series of landmark projects for Lowestoft, whilst North Norfolk involved an artist in the redevelopment of the seafront, pier and new lifeboat museum, creating projects which are integrated into the regeneration process. Both projects aim to encourage economic development by increasing visitor numbers and extending the tourist season.
- The A13 Artscape Project was one of the largest, most ambitious and innovative projects in the United Kingdom. Now completed, the project intended to secure the economic and environmental transformation of Barking and Dagenham.
- The Whitstable Biennial aims to attract new audiences and economic benefits. Working with limited resources the project reinforces the town's reputation as a centre for artistic activity.

These projects demonstrate the potential for public art projects to contribute to tourist, social and economic development in a variety of locations. Their success depends on financial investment, staff resource, local commitment and strategic vision.

4. Strategy: Aims and Objectives

Public Art and Urban Regeneration

Public art has been shown elsewhere to contribute to the development of distinct locations and encouraging positive changes in external perceptions.

The importance of design and the contribution that public art makes has been endorsed by central government and a wide range of national and regional bodies.

Good design (and public art) is described by Southend-on-Sea Borough Council in the draft Local Development Framework as being an important factor in the regeneration of Southend as a 'cultural and intellectual hub'.

The involvement of artists at the earliest possible stage results in projects which are more appropriate to their context, accepted more readily and cost effective.

Tourism Development

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council has been a popular short break destination for many years. Recently the Council has aspired to attract new audiences, who spend more in the town over a longer period of time.

Public art has been shown elsewhere to contribute to identity, generate tourist opportunities, attract new visitors, and increase the length of the tourist season.

An ambitious public art programme linked to the town's commitment to innovation would develop the profile of Southend-on-Sea Borough Council as an exciting quality destination.

Southend should commission landmark works by artists, projects which interpret and promote 'hidden Southend', and major temporary commissions linked to the tourist season.

The development of a 'critical mass' of projects linked to regeneration of the town centre, seafront and residential neighbourhoods, will contribute to the development of Southend's cultural profile.

Economic and Social Development

Southend has been identified as 'a cultural and intellectual hub' in the Thames Gateway Strategy.

The commissioning of public art could contribute to the development of the cultural profile of the Borough and encouraging economic development, corporate relocation, the creation of new jobs and housing, and support for the local creative industries.

The establishment of a robust Borough-wide policy promoting public art could enhance building and land values, and has the potential to maximize public benefit from private investment.

Local people are a focus of this strategy and it is important to create opportunities in which they can participate and can become involved in decision making about the design and use of their environment.

Planning and Resources

The planning process has been acknowledged nationally as an important method of securing works of public art and has the potential to encourage ambitious and innovative projects.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Council:

- prioritises three strategic areas of activity for public art: planning and urban regeneration, tourism and, economic and social development.
- commissions works by artists linked to the Council's capital programme.
- provides examples of good practice in their own projects.
- promotes the involvement of artists at an early stage in the design process.
- advocates public art to developers and others as being integral to the development process.
- links programming of temporary commissions to encourage the extension of the tourist season.
- supports public art projects linked to current visitor attractions both in the town centre and sea front.
- involves local organisations and residents in the development of public art projects.
- establishes a public art policy which will be promoted to the development sector.
- expands their existing design award scheme to include works which incorporate innovative and ambitious works of art.

5. Strategy: Approaches and Opportunities

This section proposes a range of approaches and projects linked to the strategic targets of public art: planning and urban regeneration, tourism and, economic and social development.

Planning and Urban Regeneration

The Council does not have a Percent for Art or public art policy but the provision of public art is included in the Major Scheme checklist used by planning officers.

The Local Development Framework is currently being drafted and acknowledges the importance of good design and the role that public art can play within this.

This should be supported by a clear public art policy, advice for developers and the linking of public art provision to the developers 'design philosophy statement' required as part of the Section 106 agreements.

Substantial investment in the Borough is planned both by Central Government and private developers through the Thames Gateway programme. This involves improvements to a wide range of public facilities including schools, hospitals and transport, as well as substantial investment in new housing.

In addition, there are many joint developments, which include improvements to the central civic area, the University and the refurbishment of shopping precincts. These offer opportunities for the Borough Council and their partners to set examples of good collaborative practice between artists, architects and landscape designers.

Involvement of the proposed local development agency 'Southend Renaissance' will be an important factor in securing public art activity.

Tourism Development

The planning of a series of landmark projects which consolidate the work already undertaken at Pier Hill will create a 'critical mass' of works and contribute to the development of Southend as a major cultural attraction.

Potential projects might include high profile schemes such as the proposed new museum, the possible casino / hotel scheme, the airport redevelopment, and an annual series of major temporary commissions linked to the tourist season.

The development of a programme of discrete projects linked to the discovery of 'hidden Southend' would also benefit tourism development. These might include projects linked to the rail network, local parks, historic and buildings of interest, and areas of environmental importance such as Leigh Marshes.

Economic and Social Development

Public art is an important driver in economic and social development and the planning of a range of projects which contributes to the Borough's identity and local neighbourhoods' will be beneficial.

The development of a programme of neighbourhood projects using the Homezones model will provide a valuable opportunity for local people through local arts projects to become involved in the strategy and engage in decisions about their living and working environment.

Consideration should be given to projects linked to highway development programmes.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Council:

- adopts the Public Art Policy and produces advice for developers on public art to be included in the Design and Townscape Supplementary Planning document.
- works closely with developers from an early stage and encourages them to take a more adventurous approach to public art.
- includes reference to the Council's Public Art Policy in the local development framework and the Green Space and Green Grid Strategy.
- initiates an ongoing programme of major projects linked to new and proposed developments. Particular attention should be paid to the central courts, the University and major new housing developments such as the Shoeburyness Old Ranges scheme.
- ensures that provision is made for public art within the project briefs and budgets for new landmark developments such as the proposed new museum.
- plans a programme of major temporary projects linked to annual events such as 'Design Front' and the Air Show.
- further research the possibility of developing projects in schools, health buildings, transport development buildings with other public sector partners.
- plans an ongoing programme of discreet projects linked to the development of neighbourhood area which closely involves local groups and people.

6. Process

The success of the strategy will depend on the Council taking a proactive role and establishing standards of best practice, initiating and developing partnerships, providing support to staff, and promoting projects and schemes.

Best Practice

The Council has an important role in setting best practice principles. This includes the provision of adequate budgets, proper briefs and agreements for artists, strategies for consultation and interpretation, and a commitment to care and maintenance.

Partnerships

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council has an extensive network of partners involved in the development, funding and realisation of projects. Many of these already have a commitment to public art and should be encouraged to become partners in the Public Art Strategy.

Staff Support and Training

The development of a successful public art strategy is dependent on the expertise of relevant staff members. The provision of training for officers and the allocation of sufficient staff time for managing and overseeing the delivery of projects is critical.

The Borough Council should ensure that existing members of staff with appropriate expertise are involved in the strategy.

Focal Point Gallery with its curatorial expertise and existing education and outreach programme could make an important combination of the strategy.

Marketing and Promotion

The marketing and promotion of the strategy and the projects that result from this will be crucial to their success and the achievement of the strategic aims and objectives.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Council:

- promotes best practice as an integral part of all schemes.
- considers ongoing care and maintenance in the development of all projects.
- allows for the decommissioning of works that are no longer appropriate or have suffered extensive damage.

- includes consultation and interpretation in all projects with working partnerships developed with local groups.
- develops a broad range of partnerships for the delivery of public art projects.
- allows for staffing and resources, and supports this through the appointment of specialist consultants.
- develops ongoing partnerships with commissioning agencies and public art consultants for the delivery of public art projects.
- undertakes an annual training programme for officers involved in planning and economic development, which would provide information on current developments, practice and opportunities.
- provides an annual information session for Members on current projects, opportunities and economic and social benefits.
- develops an ongoing programme of marketing and promotion linked to existing and future projects.

7. Costs and Funding

Costs

The success of the strategy will be dependent on investment by the Council, the attraction of partnership funding, and contributions made as a result of planning agreements.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Council:

- leads the development of public art projects in the Borough through the allocation of an annual budget for project development, promotion and public programmes.
- creates an annual 'seed-fund' for temporary projects of £15,000 for the development of initial proposals linked to the Council's tourism strategy.
- allocates annual development funding of £5,000 toward the costs of artists being involved at an early stage in the design of neighbourhood projects.
- utilises these seed-funds to develop preliminary ideas and to attract financial investment from external organizations.

- allocates funding for the ongoing care and maintenance of projects. This would be based on the volume of projects undertaken and the Council's contractual responsibilities.
- allows for external management and advisory costs. This should be included in relevant project budgets where appropriate.

Funding

There are grants and funds available towards the cost of funding public art projects details of which are included in the report.

This is not an exhaustive list and changes to funding criteria and application procedures are common. In addition, new funding opportunities may also occur due to changes in local policy and new government initiatives.

Southend is one of the major regeneration hubs in the Thames Gateway South Essex area and substantial opportunities occur for attracting regeneration funds.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Council:

- adopts a Public Art Policy requiring the allocation of 1% of construction costs for works by artists is a requirement in Section 106 agreements.
- utilises Council funds to attract additional funding and funding partners.
- investigates the opportunities offered through Arts & Business to commercial developments in the Borough.
- investigates the possibility of creating an aggregate fund for public art.