

CALL FOR INTEREST

BENTLEY BRIDGE RETAIL PARK
PUBLIC ART COMMISSION OPPORTUNITY

**BILSTON
CRAFT GALLERY**

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: 9AM 29 OCTOBER 2012

Bentley Bridge Retail Park Public Art Commission Opportunity

Call for Artists and Makers

WAVE, Wolverhampton Arts, Venues and Experiences, invites proposals from artists and designer-makers for a public art commission to be sited in the Bentley Bridge retail park, Wednesfield, Wolverhampton. A commission fee of **£25 000** is available for this opportunity.

Bentley Bridge retail park is a busy modern shopping and leisure development adjacent to Wednesfield Village centre, an area of Wolverhampton with a long history as a settlement in its own right, going back to the Domesday book.

This public art opportunity has been made available through the development's owners to enhance the appearance of the park and increase its connection with the local area, especially its links with the historic village high street next door. Creative proposals in a range of media are invited to meet the artists' brief set out below.

The commissioning process will be managed by Bilston Craft Gallery, of WAVE, with community involvement. The deadline for applications is **9am Monday 29th October 2012**; shortlisting and selection is planned to be complete by the end of November. It is expected that installation of the public artwork will be complete by **Autumn 2013**.

Applications should include:

- 1) CV
- 2) Proposed approach to the commission addressing the criteria (maximum 2 sides A4)
- 3) Draft costing within specified budget, covering fee, materials and fabrication costs, and installation works and costings
- 4) Up to 8 images of past work with completed image list, the combined size of emailed attachments must be NO MORE THAN 5MB; larger files may be submitted on CD

Application packs and guidance can be downloaded from our website;

<http://www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/supporting-creativity/current-opportunities/>

Please submit applications via email to **bilstoncraftgallery@wolverhampton.gov.uk**. If you wish to send supporting materials the address is Bilston Craft Gallery, Mount Pleasant, Bilston WV14 7LU.

If you have any further questions regarding the project please contact Sophie Heath or Carol Thompson on 01902 552 505 or at sophie.heath@wolverhampton.gov.uk.

Context, Background and General Guidance for Applicants

Wednesfield is an historic local centre that became part of Wolverhampton in 1966. Wodnesfelde appears in the Domesday book (1085) and the placename makes reference to the Anglo-Saxon god Woden. Wednesfield also gives its name to the 10th century Battle of Wodnesfeld where the Anglo-Saxon forces of Mercia and Wessex won a great victory against a Viking army, although the exact location of the battle is unclear. Wednesfield remained an agricultural settlement of mainly small-scale holdings into the 18th century but small metalworking trades grew up in the town through the 1700s, especially locksmithing and trapmaking. These industries expanded rapidly after 1800 and the trapmakers of Wednesfield were unrivalled across the country, sending traps for exotic quarry like lions and hyenas to the ends of the Empire and winning medals at international exhibitions. The growing canal and railway network increased the scope of local industry and after 1900 Wednesfield saw the establishment of bigger firms and factories especially metal fabricators like Weldless Steel Tube Co. and Wolverhampton Metal Company. Many firms survived the Great Depression and were able to grow during the Second World War. Manufacturing continued to expand in the 1950s and 60s and many new housing estates were established.

In common with much of the region, Wednesfield's manufacturing industries have declined in the later 20th century presenting a major challenge to its close-knit and proud community. Today the area is grappling with high unemployment and many associated issues of social and economic disadvantage including poor health, low educational attainment, and low social mobility. However Wednesfield remains a locale with a strong and independent identity and extensive grassroots community networks throughout its ethnically diverse population. The Wyrley and Essington Canal first came to Wednesfield in 1794 and remains open today for canalboats and walks along the towpath. It is known locally as the 'Curly Wyrley' as it twists and winds about the town to follow one level rather than requiring locks. Wednesfield retains some key historic buildings: the parish church St Thomas's was first built in 1750 and rebuilt after fire in 1903 to much the same design. Also in the village centre is the historic pub the *Dog and Partridge*, which probably dates back to the 16th century, and the 18th century *Boat* inn. Wednesfield High Street was widened in the late 1950s with new-build shops which continue to house a wide range of independent traders and an outdoor market several days a week. The local Sikh community, established in Wednesfield in numbers from the 1950s, is served by the Guru Nanak Gurdwara, rebuilt on a large scale in the village centre in 2005. In 2011 the new Wednesfield Library and community hub was opened alongside a landscaped plaza with water features.

The Bentley Bridge retail and leisure development was established in the 1990s as part of the regeneration of previously industrial land. The park took some time to gather momentum but is now going from strength to strength with major retailers opening large stores including Next, TK Maxx, Laura Ashley and a wide variety of eateries, gym, movie complex and bowling lanes. The relationship of the development to the adjacent Wednesfield village and high street is however problematic with little to encourage people accessing Bentley Bridge to move beyond it into the wider local area. The complex takes its name from the Bentley canal opened in 1843 and closed in the 1960s – it is built over the route of the first section of this canal. As with many similar retail developments of its era the architecture is utilitarian and standard without individual or local character.

The public art commission provides an opportunity to draw on the rich and unique heritage and identity of Wednesfield and make a connection between the retail park and the village immediately beside it. The creative commission should also draw on and enable the rich community and social networks of Wednesfield, supporting social opportunities and interaction in and around the town centre. The goals of the creative commissioning at Bentley Bridge are as follows:

- 1) To enrich the built environment of Bentley Bridge with an attractive, engaging and imaginative work of public art
- 2) To bring a unique local character, and sense of Wednesfield as a place, to the retail development in order to connect it to its location and users' identity; this should reflect contemporary identity as well as drawing on the heritage of the town
- 3) To increase links between Bentley Bridge and Wednesfield village, and signpost and encourage users of the retail development to discover the complementary amenities of the high street and village beyond

A fundamental aspect of the Bentley Bridge public art project is community engagement, education and participation in the process. We expect this to include direct encounters between the commissioned artist and groups of residents, users of the retail park and town centre, and local traders, and community involvement in the process of developing the initial proposal through to the final installation. The successful applicant will be required to assist the development of and participate fully in the community engagement programme. This may include community consultation, presentation and discussions of work-in-progress, leading hands-on workshops, participating in community presentations of significant history, context and local experiences to inform the commissioning, or other types of engagement as judged appropriate.

Applicants should specifically cover their experience of, and enthusiasm for public engagement/educational creative practice in both their CV and proposal.

All proposals will be judged against the specific criteria in these guidance notes and the following brief. Proposals will be shortlisted and a final selection made at interview. A contract will be agreed with the successful candidate which will include participation in community engagement, provision of a maintenance manual for the commission and resolution of any issues that arise in the first year after installation.

Bilston Craft Gallery is part of WAVE, Wolverhampton Arts, Venues, and Experiences, and is sited in historic premises near the centre of Bilston in Wolverhampton that have housed a municipal museum and art gallery since 1937. Bilston Craft Gallery is the largest dedicated contemporary craft venue in the West Midlands with a varied temporary exhibition programme showcasing the best of current craft practice. The venue also represents significant historic collections for the area, such as the renowned Bilston enamels, with an emphasis on the industrial skills and design involved in their manufacture. The Gallery is known for its arts engagement work with all ages and draws on considerable experience of commissioning artists and makers, from small-scale work and projects to public art commissions.

Useful Links:

<http://www.localhistory.scit.wlv.ac.uk/articles/Wednesfield/contents.htm>

Local history information on Wednesfield

<http://www.localhistory.scit.wlv.ac.uk/listed/StThomas.htm>

Specific information on St Thomas's Church in Wednesfield

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Tettenhall

Brief summary of Battle of Tettenhall/Wodnesfelde

<http://www.completelyretail.co.uk/scheme/3521/index.html>

Information on Bentley Bridge

<http://www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/visit/bilston>

Bilston Craft Gallery website, you can also follow us on facebook 'Bilston Craft Gallery' and Twitter 'BilstonCraftGal'

<http://www.wv11.co.uk/>

An award-winning website dedicated to community news and events in Wednesfield and beyond

Artist's Brief: Bentley Bridge Public Art Commission

Location: an external site in the pedestrian areas of the Bentley Bridge retail park, possibly in a covered walkway linking the park with the village culminating in a paved area on the village side

Budget : £25 000

Medium : any durable material, visual and sensory appeal is important

The Bentley Bridge retail development comprises several parades of shops and businesses arranged around large central car parks. It is inward-facing and neutral apart from the colourful branding of the business occupiers. A paved covered walkway provides a key access route for pedestrians between Bentley Bridge and Wednesfield Town Centre; there is an open-air paved area on the village side. From this point the historic centre of Wednesfield is in view. Many travellers to Wednesfield by bus also access Bentley Bridge via this route. This is one possible location for the public art commission but other sites within the retail park that have high footfall, good sightlines, and the potential to link Bentley Bridge to the town will be considered.

The project team wish to commission an inspiring and unique artwork that will invite playful and social engagement in this public space while matching the modern style and leisure purpose of Bentley Bridge. The commission should be on a human scale and encourage close encounters but be visually striking enough to command attention from passers-by. The commissioners are interested in proposals that have wayfinding or trail qualities that signpost and link Bentley Bridge to Wednesfield village. The artwork should emphatically reflect the contemporary and stylish aspirations of the retail park and its users, however the rich history of Wednesfield and its inhabitants should be drawn on to provide a foundation and context for the work. It is important that this work contributes to a distinct townscape and connects this modern development to Wednesfield's unique identity.

A wide range of media and interactive concepts will be considered such as sound, touch, etc, but the installation should be visually attractive and resilient enough to withstand the elements and public interaction. The work should have low ongoing maintenance requirements and costs. We are looking for an inspiring and surprising commission that will engage the people of Wednesfield and users of the retail park.

We are keen that the project involves a diverse range of local people and visitors to Wednesfield of all ages and backgrounds. The commissioning team includes a variety of stakeholders from young people to councillors and has broad networks in the village and the retail park. An early stage of the project is likely to be consultation and involvement of the village traders and market stallholders in the town.

Pictures of Bentley Bridge and Wednesfield

Aerial view of Bentley Bridge with key locations marked, © CWC group



Views of the Carpark and shop fronts © Completely Retail



Looking towards the covered walkway to Wednesfield village



The paved area between Bentley Bridge and Wednesfield village, looking back towards the carpark © John M, www.geograph.org.uk



Market Day and shops, Wednesfield High Street © Richard Webb, www.geograph.org.uk



The Boat Inn and The Wyrley and Essington Canal © John M www.geograph.org.uk



The new Wednesfield Library and Guru Nanak temple behind © John M www.geograph.org.uk



St Thomas's Church, Wednesfield © John M www.geograph.org.uk



Possible location for Artwork

