



WIDE OPEN SPACE

Developing creative places in Dorset

Dorset Design and Heritage Forum



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Can art, craft and design contribute to building rural places and localities ?

Could creative thinking contribute towards a new vernacular built environment and build sustainable futures for the county and its people?

Wide Open Space is an initiative from the Dorset Design and Heritage Forum (DDHF), supported by funding from Arts Council England, which aims to develop a programme of strategic public art projects that place the county at the forefront of a new rural cultural agenda.

Directly supporting the aims of the Dorset Community Strategy, Wide Open Space will engage with the key issues of:

- **Affordable and sustainable housing**
- **Developing the rural economy**
- **Protecting landscapes and safeguarding environments**
- **Creating safe, strong and inclusive rural communities**
- **Creating wellbeing through culture**

There is no doubt that art projects in the public realm can engage with these social, political and economic aspirations to interpret and create meaningful places as well as to create new spaces of public dialogue. For instance an evaluation of PROJECT - *engaging artists in the built environment*, a programme of public art projects organised by Public Art South West, CABE and Arts and Business in 2006 concluded that **public art is a positive force for change, raising the quality and value of projects, benefiting the working practices of the teams involved and positively engaging communities.**

The report also found that the key conditions for maximising the input of artists were found to be

- clarity of the brief
- early engagement with artists in the planning/design process
- supportive project management
- equality of artists in the team
- the value of peer group support for artists if possible.

Whilst the greatest body of evidence for public art relates to the urban experience of regeneration and development there is an increasing understanding of the fact that art in rural environments has an important role to play in both the production of physical spaces and in the processes that accompany this. New initiatives from both artist lead groups and from public sector agencies have set out to expand the boundaries of how art can contribute to rural agendas; social inclusion through community projects, developing sustainable futures through design and the enhancement and interpretation of protected landscapes.

Taking the lead in art for rural environments

Dorset Design and Heritage Forum wish to fund artist involvement in 4 exemplar projects with a wide spread across the county in 2008-9, within the following priority areas:

- 1 **Sustainability and design quality in public spaces**
- 2 **Engagement with affordable housing schemes**
- 3 **Models of good practice combining traditional materials and innovative design**
- 4 **Collaborative design processes in protected landscapes**

Further projects will also be sought for inclusion in a portfolio of projects to be developed in 2009-10, subject to further funding application. To ensure a future legacy of innovation and quality, work will be documented and form the basis of a publication containing information and guidance for planners and design professionals in the county.



Edible Estates by artist Fritz Haeg; an ongoing agricultural project that replaces suburban lawns in the United States and England with highly productive domestic edible landscapes.

1. Sustainability and design in public spaces

Sustainability, the idea that we can minimise our impact on future generations, has been a key concern for our society for many years now and its importance has not diminished. Arguably nowhere is this more important than in rural environments where innovative thinking is required to address concerns over renewable energy, food production, transport, imbalanced demographics and environmental degradation.

“planning in particular has a major and positive contribution to make in ...

- *Promoting the highest standards of resource and energy efficiency ...;*
- *Requiring land-use patterns that reduce the need and the propensity to travel by car;*
- *Vigorously promoting small- and large-scale renewable energy projects;*
- *Reformatting or restricting development which would otherwise have a major negative impact on CO2 emissions; and*
- *Adapting to the harmful impacts of climate change.”¹*

True sustainability also requires a major culture change in order for people to have the opportunity to adapt their behaviour. Artists can contribute to community planning processes by engaging people in the process of creating public space and the results of their work creates opportunities for raising the profile of particular issues.

Wide Open Space is therefore looking for projects that involve artists in contributing to the sustainable design of high quality public spaces. Examples of projects that would be considered are:

- Design of public spaces and places in villages and towns: for instance accessible landscaping and planting, recycled materials for street furniture, low impact lighting schemes, creating new social areas
- Enhancing public transport terminals and infrastructure, cycle ways and paths
- Creating public spaces that are welcoming for both young and old together, or that encourage outdoor activity and exercise
- Commissioning artists to work on community plans



“Can wind power have a positive effect on the landscape and tourism? Are wind farms examples of contemporary beauty or monstrosities obstructing the view?”
Shelter/Wind farm with shelters from DOTT Design camp 2007

¹ Town and Country Planning Association, Sustainable design and construction: Guidance for planners on preparing development plan policies at the regional and local levels

2. Engagement with affordable housing schemes

“Planning policy statement 3 (housing) states that local authorities should be aiming to create: ‘Places, streets and spaces which meet the needs of people, are visually attractive, safe, accessible, functional, inclusive, have their own distinctive identity and maintain and improve local character”²

A shortage of affordable homes in Dorset is predicted by the County Council over the coming years which may lead to employment recruitment and retention problems. Factors influencing this situation include a new inward migration to the countryside from urban centres, increasing second home ownership and an aging population demanding more accessible and supported housing (and who will also need more carers who need low cost housing). Equally newly formed households and young single people starting out need new affordable housing provision. Although the main reason for the lack of affordable housing stock, high house prices, shows signs of being alleviated Dorset still faces issues such lack of development land and large conservation areas.

The solution to these problems will only come through new thinking about housing and housing design. For example lack of land and greater single occupancy has led to a decrease in the space available per housing unit on most builds – how can new design make houses feel bigger, or overlap/join domestic and civic spaces ? How can houses be thought of and designed to be not only environmentally friendly, but positively beneficial, e.g. using renewable energy, better water management systems or making space for local flora and fauna ?

In addressing this agenda it is also essential to look at the character of houses, a major factor in their appeal. The challenge in sensitive rural environments is how to respect local character without simply repeating what has gone before, throwing together pastiches of historical styles. Can there be ways of creating new vernacular architectures which are distinct, functional, socially sensitive and attractive ? There is certainly no doubt that good design adds to both the quality of the built environment and potentially adds value to new and refurbished housing stock in a difficult housing market.

As part of this mix artists and craftspeople can contribute both ideas and knowledge of materials to projects. Wide Open Space is therefore looking for projects where a genuine collaboration with developers, housing associations, communities and design teams can take place for the benefit of residents and developer alike. Ideas for potential projects include, but are not limited to:

- Involvement in masterplanning, consultation and community planning processes
- Looking at architectural detailing, lighting, shared furniture and communal spaces such as gardens
- Encouraging community cohesion through local art interventions
- Developing new ways of using domestic spaces, for instance a major contribution to national health would be encouragement for residents to grow food in their domestic spaces

² CABE, Building for Life, 2008

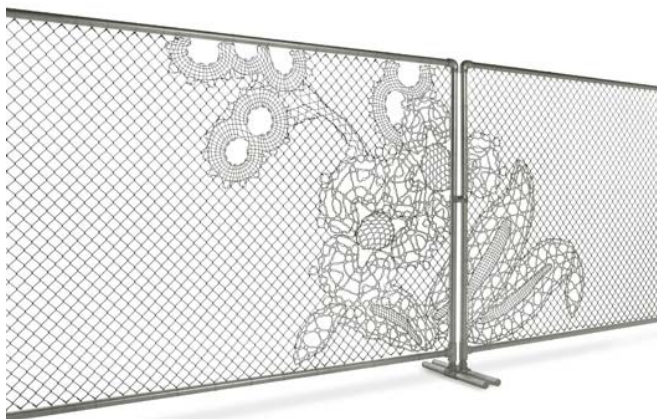
3. Models of good practice combining traditional materials and innovative design

The character of rural environments like Dorset are appreciated for both their natural beauty and for the built environment that has been historically created from it. From the beauty of Portland and Purbeck limestones used for detailing Georgian houses, to the earthy cob and bricks made from Fullers Earth, Oxford, Gault and Kimmeridge Clays, to the flint courses among houses in the chalk uplands. However in a globalised economy traditional materials are now in competition with other, often imported, materials which are cheaper, easier to manufacture or have more advantageous intrinsic properties, thermally or in terms of water resistance.

In spite of this sustainability agendas have forced a rethink about how traditional materials can be re-invented by looking at the whole life cost of production (factoring into the cost of its carbon footprint and the material's longevity as well as the manufacturer's price per unit). Sometimes this means looking back towards traditional techniques such as straw bale housing or timber frame building and how can these ancient materials and methods be reinterpreted for a new age. Likewise new, or recycled, materials are being invented that have excellent whole life credentials but need development into attractive, and functional, forms or structures.

Artists, and particularly craftspeople, those with a special knowledge of materials, offer both wide ranging thinking on these subjects and particular expertise which can contribute to designs for both urban and rural environments. Wide Open Space is therefore looking for projects in public contexts that have this potential, particularly where there is also benefit for local economies, e.g. agriculture, manufacturing or creative industries. Projects could include:

- Addressing the aesthetic value of new materials, e.g. blending energy efficient materials with local materials
- Looking at the psychological and physiological impact of new and old materials in the built environment
- Developing new processes for refining, manufacturing or processing traditional materials to meet current standards
- Utilising, or making apparent local geological or agriculture products in the landscape e.g. in roads, bridges or buildings.



Lace fence by Joep Verhoeven

4. Collaborative design processes in protected landscapes

“the Countryside Agency recognises the importance of good design in achieving a better quality countryside in social, economic and environmental terms – making places attractive for people to live in, work in and visit so that communities are sustainable in the long term.”³

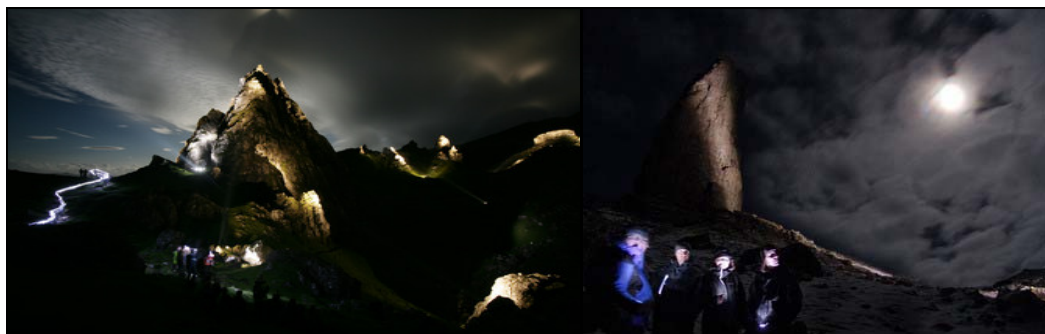
Protected landscapes in the UK are the site of many interests. People who wish to use land and water for its recreational use, scientific interest, economic benefits, heritage worth and not least their aesthetic value. Balancing these, often conflicting, interests makes their management a challenge.

Questions that arise include: How is it possible to reconcile protection of environmental assets with the fact that they are living cultural landscapes which face significant economic and social pressures like the decline in traditional agriculture, loss of tranquillity and changing social make up of villages and towns? How can local economies be developed without significant impact on resources and how can visitors be encouraged to use the land in a sustainable way? In the face of these issues land managers must continue to look for new ways forward and engage communities in the process.

Strategies involving artists in this area have ranged from the staging of spectacular events that retain a sympathy with the environment to the use of art in interpreting the mythologies and stories of places. Artists have also been asked to assist in consultation with communities, finding out what their hopes and aspirations are for the future. As part of this new partnerships are being forged with organisations like the Forestry Commission, British Waterways and the National Trust that develop innovative approaches to conservation in the 21st century. A key success factor in these new relationships has been collaborative working, bringing in a wide variety of expertise from scientists, designers, educators and managers.

Wide Open Space is therefore seeking partners for projects in officially protected landscapes in Dorset. Examples of projects that could be considered are:

- Developing new spaces for leisure and recreation in the countryside which accommodate both people and eco-systems
- Enhancing renewable energy structures, waste management or other facilities to address visual impact, or other design concerns
- Allowing spaces for play as well as purposeful recreation for health or education
- Raising the understanding of the importance and irreplaceable nature of our historic environment through new interpretative strategies.



The Old Man of Storr, a temporary light project in Skye in a Site of Special Scientific Interest

³ Sustainable design principles for the Landscape Access and Recreation Division of the Countryside Agency, May 2006

Call for proposals

Wide Open Space is inviting proposals from across the county of Dorset that fit within these project themes. Partners could be from both the public and private sectors, e.g.: government agencies, local authorities, towns, villages, parishes, land managers, developers and housing associations. The main requirement is an openness to collaboration on the involvement of artists in the development or creation of public places and spaces,

£20,000 in total is available in year one (2008/9) – approximately £5,000 per project - to contribute to the costs of employing an artist in whatever capacity is necessary to implement the project. It is likely however that this will only cover design and development of work(s) and that further funding will need to be found to build or implement projects. Partnership funding is not necessary although part of the ambition for this project is that it will leave a significant legacy, and therefore that projects selected should have a high likelihood of tangible impacts and not be left marooned in the design phase.

Wide Open Space will also be able to offer support for the partnerships to recruit, brief, appoint an artist and identify other funding sources. Partners will also be expected to contribute to documenting and evaluating the process and outcomes, which it is hoped will be the subject of a publication once all four initial projects are completed. Projects which cannot be funded in year one will have the potential to be taken forward into a further programme of projects if the first wave is successful.

Funding will be allocated solely at the discretion of the Design and Heritage Forum on the recommendation of the Creative Places Development Manager. Projects will be selected on the basis of their potential for fulfilling the ambitions of Wide Open Space, which can be summarised as:

- Originality and innovation of the project idea
- Potential for sustainability
- Opportunities for learning and education
- Participation by communities
- Collaboration between artists and design teams
- Replicability and potential for leaving a legacy
- Potential as best practice
- Creating new partnerships or strengthening existing ones
- Geographic spread across Dorset

There is no formal application process. If you are interested in developing a project together then please contact Alex Murdin, Creative Places Development Manager to discuss your ideas either by e-mail or by phone. We will then ask partners to write a summary of their project of no more than 1000 words, plus any appropriate supporting material, for presentation to the DDHF.

Contact Details

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Resources

There follows a selection of websites that give information about public art and the processes used to engage artists in the public realm. A range of actual projects in the relevant areas are also included for inspiration.

General

Public Art South West - www.publicartonline.org.uk

Ixia - www.ixia-info.com

Public art on wikipedia.org - Introductory article about public art from the free online encyclopedia - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_art

The case for public art

[PROJECT evaluation](#), *Comedia*, 2006 - The purpose of PROJECT was to engage artists, public agencies and the private sector in a range of projects that will have a positive impact on places.

[Public Art: Per Cent for Art Scheme - General National Guidelines](#) (2004)

Clear, comprehensive guidelines which provide a common national approach to implementation of the Per Cent for Art Scheme in Ireland. Contains detailed information on: Funding levels, budgeting; Implementation; The stages of a public art commission step by step; Appendices covering contracts, artists brief, sample budget, evaluation; Selected bibliography and reports. Published by the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, Government of Ireland.

[Public Art and the Planning System and Process in England \(2007\)](#) - The first review of the relationship between public art and the planning system in England for 15 years was based on extensive consultation and is aimed at everyone involved in commissioning public art. Includes guidance on a Supplementary Planning Document for Public Art. Update 2008 covers a review of proposed changes to the planning system and their impact on public art.

The arts and consultation

[Designing our environment - towards a better built environment for the south west](#) (2004) -

This publication sets out some key actions and identifies areas for improvement in the quality of development in the south west, establishing a framework to inform design in the region for the coming years. Published by Creating: Excellence – the south west regeneration centre.

[Arts in Rural Consultation Guide, Community Council of Shropshire](#), (2006)

The Arts in Rural Consultation (ARC) Project was developed to explore the effectiveness of using the arts as a way to secure more inclusive consultation in the Parish planning process. ARC was developed in discussion with workers at both the Countryside Agency and the Arts Council West Midlands.

[Consultation Through Creativity](#)

“The purpose of this toolkit is to provide non-arts professionals with a guide to how arts activity – in its many forms – can be used to reach different groups of people, and how the arts can act as a means of gathering people’s views and opinions on an amazing range of issues.” Published by Staffordshire County Council.

Urban regeneration

[If you always do what you have always done .. The value of the arts in regeneration practice](#) (2003) - Six regional case studies, researched by Jayne Murray, showing art engaging with people to contribute positively to place. With a critical essay by Katherine Shonfield. Commissioned by Public Art West Midlands, Public Art Forum (now ixia) and MADE.

[By Design - Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice](#) (2000)

Provides practical advice to help implement the Government's commitment to good design, as set out in PPG1. It encourages those who influence and shape development decisions to think more deeply and sensitively about the living environments being created, and refers to the role public art has to play in urban design. Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment/Dept of Environment, Transport and the Regions.

[The Arts in Urban Renaissance](#) (2003) - Outlines the role of the arts within urban renewal and development in the South East of England. Published by Arts Council England, South East

[What's art got to do with it?](#) (2003)

Briefing paper on the role of the arts in neighbourhood renewal by Phyllida Shaw.

Protected landscapes

[Natural Partners: Arts in the Protected Landscape](#) (2006)

This publication is designed to encourage those working in protected landscapes and in the arts to explore innovative ways of working together for mutual aims. It outlines the contribution the arts already makes to the rural agenda, illustrated with case studies that demonstrate good practice. Published by Arts Council England, South West (ACESW) and the South West Protected Landscape Forum (SWPLF).

[Surrey Hills project](#)

Through the Surrey Hills Landscape Assessment, the Countryside Commission wanted to explore the cultural aspects of this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty as well as appraise its technical aspects. A team of seven artists with a supplementary artist's brief to produce a workbook recording their responses to the landscape. The landscape assessment helped shape the Management Strategy for the AONB and resulted in a poetry residency which involved farmers, planners and National Trust wardens as well as school children in workshops. A Heritage Lottery Fund bid was subsequently submitted for a project to restore, interpret and celebrate culturally significant viewpoints in the Surrey Hills AONB.

[Ebb & Flow](#)

Ebb and Flow was an arts project devised by Suffolk Coastal ARTS and the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit to explore the rich history and heritage of life along the Alde and Ore. Sound artists and composer involved the local community in its production. The project was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Natural England, Suffolk Coastal District Council, Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit, the AONB Sustainable Development Fund and the Aldeburgh and District Local History Society.

[The Old Man of Storr](#)

The Old Man of Storr was a spectacular light and performance event that took people up a Scottish mountain at night. Set in a SSSI the site had to be surveyed and extreme care taken to minimise environmental impact. Community engagement took place alongside the project, funded by tourism initiatives.

Rural art projects

[Art and Architecture programme in Kielder](#)

A long running programme run by the Kielder Partnership of Northumbria Water, Forestry Commission, Arts Council and the local authority has resulted in a series of RIBA award winning commissions have been realised including James Turrells' Skyspace and most recently a new observatory.

[Heart of Reeds](#)

The creation of a reed bed designed by Chris Drury located in the heart of Lewes on the former railway sidings now reclaimed and designated as an important urban fringe Local Nature Reserve. Drury took the cross section of the human heart as its inspiration. The project involved Lewes District Council in partnership with Lewes Railway Land Wildlife Trust, East Sussex County Council, the Arts Council of England and Viridor Waste Management.

[DOTT](#)

This international design camp brought together teams of young designers, senior students, visual artists, architects and young professionals to develop sustainable tourism ideas for (and with) specific North East locations and communities. Participants came from eight different countries and spanned many disciplines. Their projects looked at everything from urban camping to the structures that are likely to emerge with the advent of geothermal energy, and the decoration of landscape using the tools and patterns of agriculture.

[Coast](#)

The website of a major three year visual arts project along the Essex coast which began in 2003 during which a series of newly commissioned permanent and temporary artworks have been installed. Coast aimed to raise the cultural and aesthetic profile of Essex's coastal area, while encouraging better access and appreciation of its landscape, people, history and ecology. Commissioned by Essex County Council.

Housing

[Burnley Elevate Artist Injection](#)

Burnley Borough Council (BBC) set up Burnley Elevate Artist Injection in order to involve artists in a major Housing Market Renewal (HMR) scheme that is addressing housing market failure.

[Up in the Air \(2000 - 2001\) and Further Up in the Air \(2001-2004\)](#)

Two programmes of artists residencies in Sheil Park, Liverpool, were jointly initiated and managed by artists Neville Gabie and Leo Fitzmaurice. The residencies and resulting temporary installations coincided with the redevelopment of the whole Sheil Park site, the demolition of existing 1960s tower blocks and the creation of high quality new homes on the same site. Both projects were developed with the support Liverpool Housing Action Trust (LHAT) and residents in the Kenley Close and Linosa Close tower blocks (subsequently demolished in 2001 and 2005 respectively). LHAT was set up in 1993 to oversee the improvement or redevelopment of high rise blocks across the city and adopted its own arts policy in 2000.

[Sovereign Housing, Barton Hill, Bristol](#)

Barton Hill is part of the New Deal for Communities inner city regeneration area in Bristol, which also covers the neighbouring areas of Lawrence Hill, Redfield and the Dings. The local area Masterplan offers significant new housing provision and sustainable improvements to education, health, employment and the environment over a 10 year period. In June 2005, Sovereign Housing Group secured a PROJECT Creative Homes Award to employ the artist David Cotterell as part of the design team for the second phase of the housing development, which includes around 65 mixed tenure homes alongside a new urban park.

Artist led projects

[Deveron arts](#)

“Deveron Arts has neither gallery space nor an arts centre. Instead, the town is the venue is our guiding leitmotif. For each project the team, together with the artists, looks for a fitting context. These 'found venues', naturally populated by the people of Huntly, serve as a stage for a range of performances, installations and exhibitions. “

[FRED](#)

FRED - the annual “art invasion of Cumbria” is an initiative by local artists and the FOLD Gallery; artists from around the globe create new work in some of England's most spectacular landscapes in what has become Europe's largest annual festival of site-specific art.

[Night Stations](#)

Night Stations is a series of site-specific light installations set in the nocturnal landscape created by artist Charles Monkhouse. Placed mainly in the rural environment, particularly Derbyshire and Cumbria, they are often on a vast scale, inviting the audiences to reconsider their assumptions about the land.

Willis Newson

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