

*A Brush
with the Land 1996
Art in the countryside*

Proceedings from a workshop held at
Atlantic College, Llantwit Major, South Wales
on 21 & 22 May 1996

Countryside Recreation Network

A UK-wide Network, CRN gives easy access to information and people concerned with countryside and related recreation matters. The Network helps the work of agencies and individuals by:

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2. promoting co-operation between member agencies in formulating and executing research on countryside and related recreation issues;
3. encouraging and assisting the dissemination of the results of countryside research and best practice on the ground.

CRN is committed to exchanging and spreading information to develop best policy and practice in countryside recreation.

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July 1996

TO A PURPOSE! WHY DO WE DO IT? ART AS COUNTRYSIDE INTERPRETATION

*Shelagh Hourahane
Consultant, CAE.heuad*

The Front Line

A giant cherry-picker, reputedly the largest in Britain, if not Europe, has arrived in Newbury with two smaller ones and is said to be heading to Reddings Copse to take the pine, says Base Hundreds of security guards escort the modern-day siege tower to within 20 yards of the pine. Lying down, it's squat and lifeless. Extended and stretching itself, it's all phallus as it pumps itself up to its full 200 feet extension.

The protesters in the treehouses watch it rise and swivel with a mix of awe, horror and increased defiance. It towers above the pine, larger than anything expected. It's man reaching over Nature. The machine circles, passes its way over the tree, seeming to sniff its prey. 'It's modernity,' says one of the tree-protectors. 'It's a metal tree.'

. . . As bulldozers set to work to push over the evicted, dismembered oaks, the giant cherry-picker comes for the pine. Its platform holds four men. One is at the controls, one has ropes and a visor, one a chainsaw, another wire cutters. They test the lower treehouse defences, approaching it first from above, then from below, clipping the barbed wire as they go The platform comes closer, cutting through the domestic hail. There are oaths and screams. A bailiff's man throws back a half-bag of rice. The chainsaw man is now coated in pink gloss

(The Guardian, 6 April 1996)

The Guardian report and the pictures that went with it read like a script for a performance of some kind. Such reporting raises awareness of environmental issues in a dramatic and expressive manner and it reaches a huge audience. Insofar as the effect of such journalism could change its readers' perception of any piece of familiar wooded countryside, it is interpretation itself. A more complicated issue for the artist is whether he/she should be involved in front-line environmental situations, such as that at Newbury or the Wandsworth Common protest launched by This Land is Ours. Where are the artists when it comes to provoking thought over hot issues? Should they be there and can they help?

Artists played a significant role in the longstanding Greenham Common anti-Trident missile protests, especially helping to design and make banners. In the current decade protest has often engaged the role of dramatised reality and, as the above report makes clear, there is a thin line between that reality and theatre. However, for most artists their opportunities to become genuinely active in the business of the interpretation of front-line environmental situations is going to be limited. When the Sea Empress went aground on the Pembrokeshire coast in Spring 1996 artists were hard pressed to contribute a voice to awareness raising about the long term effects of major oil disasters. Painting pictures with re-cycled crude oil falls just short of a stunt, while another Pembrokeshire artist's project to paint the coastline in Pembrokeshire and Shetland in order to make us focus on the value of two endangered sea-scapes, may tell us little that we do not already know about these places.

Are we asking too much of artists and too often?

However, in the context of site management, real demands and expectations are now being put upon artists of all descriptions to help in the interpretation of the countryside, and they are not always able to respond both creatively and appropriately. A glance at any edition of *Artists' Newsletter*, the magazine in which most job opportunities in the art world in Britain are advertised, will reveal requirements such as those made in the following extracts.

... An artist to undertake the development of a site-specific marker for this stretch of the Way. The Waymarker will take its inspiration from the culture and heritage of the locality and the artist will be expected to work from a local studio and involve local people in the development and implementation of the work.

(Kirkles Way, West Yorkshire, A.N. March 1994)

An *Artists' Newsletter* report of an event held at Sydenham Woods in November 1993 said that the organisers "... used artwork to raise awareness of the plight of Sydenham Hill Woods" and that the ten artists worked for two days on work which called attention to the threat to the Woods and to "... the education, recreation and conservation work taking place there."

Not only is it assumed that there are artists who have the ability and creative training to operate in such complex and circumscribed situations, but also that there are artists who have sufficient knowledge of countryside matters and of environmental issues to be effective as communicators. Consequently there is also an enormous amount of trust being put in artists by site managers and funders to do the work of interpretation well.

There is a fundamental danger in any site interpretation and that is that the interpretative material can become as important or even more important than the site itself. This is especially so when artwork is used which has a high profile because of the artist's own reputation or because the work itself is resonant and memorable. There may be an assumption that an artist has something to say simply because he/she is an artist. The problems which are inherent in such assumptions were brought home to me recently when I picked up a leaflet written by Steve Chettle of Cumbria Public Art. The leaflet was publicising the Sheepfolds project which Andy Goldsworthy is working on in Cumbria between now and 2000.

Sheepfolds connects directly with the farming tradition and history of Cumbria. By using existing sites of agricultural structures and rebuilding or repairing them, new life will be breathed into them, where before they would have simply 'melted' into the landscape, or already have disappeared, with the walling taken away for other purposes. As the change of farming methods has altered the use of these stone structures, so the interest and involvement of the artist in them will bring new and real purpose to rebuild them.

Andy Goldsworthy has an established international reputation, but Sheepfolds will work firstly at the local level, with local people being directly involved in the evolution and development of the commissions.

The extract from this leaflet involves the above assumption about the value of what the artist has to say and it also fails to address the issue of what will be the future understanding of the new artwork when it too has fallen into neglect in say, a hundred years' time. The current structures, as they 'melt' into the landscape, are meaningful as part of a purposeful past. Will the land sculptures have any long term meaning?

Interpretation should not be static

The issues raised above are not the product of a negative opinion on my part about the value of artwork in environmental interpretation. They are the result of my belief that not enough care is being given to the "why" behind interpretation and especially behind the commissioning of artwork in the countryside. In order to make positive recommendations, a more serious review and assessment of what has already been done should be initiated. In this context there is a first basic question: why do we want the public to visit a site and what should be their overwhelming memory of that visit?

On two occasions in the last four years I have visited the Ecrins National Park in the French Alps. There is a newly built visitor centre on the edge of the Alpine heart of the Park and from it leads a nature trail in which, over a distance of about a half mile of paths, are represented a microcosm of the habitat of the whole Park. In order to interpret this

trail and the wider landscape, there are a total of thirteen pictorial boards depicting general habitat, fourteen depicting specific plants, ten 'telescopes' for looking up at the carved wooden birds sitting in trees, about eighty specific species/plant labels, plus a variety of other devices for representing things that might be seen in the Park. Here is a sure case of detailed care leading to over interpretation, totally distracting the visitor from what might be observed and leading to an inevitable game of ticking off the next bit of interpretive material as it is sighted along the trail.

The experience in the Ecrins confirmed my inclination for temporary kinds of interpretive provision, which do not impact or impinge on the environment, which leave space for one's own experience and which can leave room for re-interpretation or a different focus at a later date.

Our experience of the natural environment should be holistic

A particular site may be of prime importance for its nature conservation value. But it may also have aesthetic landscape quality, be of popular or sentimental importance to the local community and those who know it well and be of historical or archaeological significance. Artwork can draw attention to elements that would not otherwise be seen and can help visitors to experience a place in a new or different way.

When he was commissioned by the Forestry Authority to work in the Garw Forest in South Wales in 1992, sculptor Michael Fairfax's brief was partly to provide a kind of built-in interpretation before the forest trails were officially opened to the public. His use of that brief led him to make several sculptures which draw attention to the previous use of the land before the conifer forests were planted. One work, Drift Mine, a charred circle of timber ends set in a mossy bank, indicates the site of a long obliterated drift mine beneath the hillside.

Because creative thinking is frequently lateral and often holistic, artists can succeed in integrating the many layers of experience of one place through a series of imaginative works. Wild Walks! with Kneehigh Theatre in Cornwall have been aiming

... to encourage people to engage with artists to develop a strong imaginative sense and appreciation of the countryside and develop exciting new ways, through the arts, of experiencing the beauty and distinctiveness of the landscape.

Wild Walks! provide a never to be forgotten experience which fires the imagination, increases awareness and appreciation of the environment, and encourages an emotional attachment to a locality and thereby an understanding of the need for its conservation and protection.

By increasing people's understanding of how we can all help save local wildlife and wild places, Wild Walks! are intended to enthuse the public into action.

(Wild Walks! press release)

It is clear that a new type of approach to our understanding and experience of the natural environment is emerging. This is one which is personal, often subjective, celebratory and creative. This is recognised in the many occasions on which art workers are now invited to lead workshops at country sites of all kinds. It is also sometimes realised in the commissioning of more permanent works in the countryside. The leaflet which advertised the Foxley Wood Sculpture Trail for the Norfolk Naturalists Trust in 1991 engagingly diverted the business of interpretation away from objective conservationist issues. It proclaimed that

For centuries, nature has been a source of inspiration for artists, and for many, art has been a key to the appreciation of nature. But this relationship has always depended on our attitude to the environment. Now we are moving away from trying to impose order and 'taming' nature, towards co-operation with the rhythm and balance, the true 'order' in our environment.

These artists share a common desire to attune to the living being of the wood and the work has been made or selected in this spirit of co-operation and celebration of this rich and ancient environment.

As artists they hope to increase our awareness of our place in nature as human beings, responding with all our senses to the natural world around us.

Artists and the sustainable future

Most nature trails, environmental projects and visitor centres are an integral part of a tourism strategy for their area, and artwork as interpretation often provides a useful ingredient in that strategy. As previously suggested, artworks are sometimes billed as an attraction in their own right. There are indeed countryside sites which some visitors will go to especially because of the presence of the arts. Grizedale Forest is a prime example of this, with its longstanding Forest Theatre and Sculpture Trails. Artworks are also guaranteed to get media coverage for a project, even if it is of the 'strange object on the tow path' type.

It is, however, worth pondering on the fact that all these places are not simply tourism traps, but are someone's home patch. If all tourism were committed to the sustainability of the natural environment and of the local community and culture there would be no

problem, no potential collision of interest. As it is, the artist working on many a countryside project will be treading a thin line between making a contribution to exploitative tourism and furrowing a path through the mix of local community interests.

While not usually trained as community workers, artists are playing an important part in creating an awareness of local distinctiveness and cultural heritage. The mission statement for the New Milestones project launched by Common Ground in 1988 affirms this role for the artist when it says,

The New Milestones Project is encouraging a new generation of town, village and countryside sculptures. It hopes to stimulate the creation of small-scale works of the imagination which express our sense of history, our love of place and of the natural world. By commissioning new permanent sculpture, we hope that local communities will explore and share their feelings about their place, and find new ways to take an active part in caring for their locality.

(Leaflet for Waterrow Path with sculptures by Michael Fairfax)

An even more influential role for artists in the development of a future for local communities was envisaged by the Barnsley CARE (Community Action in the Rural Environment) Project in its report on the Silkstones Heritage Stones project 1989/90. It urged the environmental profession to look further than the guided walk as a means of "strengthening the environmental mission", as this reaches only a limited audience. It claimed that,

The environmental profession has been slow to recognise the role people have in caring for the place they live, work and recreate in, unlike our colleagues in the social and educational fields. For our experience, the arts provide a vehicle for a greater community experience. Many of the projects we have supported - oral history, festivals, heritage stones, community maps and environmental playschemes - have led to practical projects which local communities have decided to pursue.

The community project that works is a complicated affair. The countryside project which respects the natural environment in all its facets and makes them accessible to the optimum number and range of people is a model of good management. The interpretive programme which helps visitors to understand, enjoy and experience fully without interference or condescension, is fragile and rare.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

PLANNING A REAL PROJECT WITH A REAL COMMUNITY?

Tamara Edwards-Playne
Publicity Manager and Artworker, Artscape

Which community are we talking about? The global community or the local community? In order to make a difference at a global level action needs to be taken at a local level. As Local Agenda 21 takes root around the world, what are we doing in the UK and why? That has largely been answered by the previous speaker so I'll cut straight to the nitty gritty of our experience working with communities in Hertfordshire.

One of our most ambitious projects to date is Footsteps. It is centred around a circular path that connects two villages and an urban area of Stevenage. As per usual, the aims of the project were manifold and the methods by which we achieved those aims were modified or sometimes completely revolutionised as the project progressed.

A real community project will not go to the linear plan of funding application. If the overall aim is genuinely to engage a local community in experiencing their local countryside through art and other activities, then specific aims of the project will alter as more is known about the community, their needs and their thoughts. Too often community projects fail to get local support because they are not flexible enough to respond fully to what the community wants.

A COMMUNITY PROJECT NEEDS FLEXIBILITY

Somehow, in your planning and your funding applications there has to be room for unexpected outcomes. There has to be a genuine wish to put the community in the driving seat while you are checking the tyre pressure and filling the car with petrol. And yet, at the same time, there is usually a need to assure your funders that you are keeping a firm grip on things.

GETTING THE COMMUNITY ON BOARD

This can be relatively easy, depending on the community area and what previous experience you've had working with them. During Footsteps we found this stage very difficult because the three areas were so diverse and Artscape as an organisation was largely unknown to them. That particular urban area of Stevenage had received very little positive community

development, to which they had responded with apathy and negativity. The area had no pride in itself, and consequently a high degree of cynicism that anything positive could happen. It was difficult to get people to attend meetings or workshops, as they did not feel altogether safe to walk the streets or motivated to turn out. Whereas in Weston, which is a picturesque village, the majority of the community did not seem to be at home as they were commuters. They were pre-disposed to art but not in the sense of community art. As for increasing countryside involvement, many people did not see the invisible barriers that are faced by those without a pair of green wellies on their feet. Therefore it was difficult for them to see why we would need to use the arts as a vehicle for increasing awareness and involvement in the countryside. Graveley, the other village, is quite spread out and suffers from a large road dividing the village in half. And they, too, did not make any immediate connections between art and the environment. So how do we make an environmental arts project relevant to the community and ensure involvement?

GETTING THE COMMUNITY ON BOARD BY ASKING THEM WHAT THEY THINK

This can be done by asking people who are the 'somebodies' of an area, such as the parish council, the youth club leaders, the over 50s club, etc. etc. But we've found that this is not enough to gain a representative view of the community. So we employed a technique developed by the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, called Planning for Real. This process involves getting the community to build a large scale model of the local area, warts and all. The community are then invited to open sessions where they add suggestion cards to the model, such as 'zebra crossing here' or 'more lighting here'. Suggestion cards can also be made up that reflect your interest areas, such as 'sculpture here' or 'gateway here' etc. etc. The Planning for Real idea was introduced to people using door knocking and showing samples. We took the opportunity to find out about the level of awareness of the footpath and people's interest in attending art workshops.

But by using the lateral approach to kick-starting our arts project we also had to deal with the non-arts issues that were raised. The Planning for Real process cast a wide net and gained a lot of ideas which were successfully managed by the residents in consultation with the appropriate bodies. The results included reduction of village speed limits, more play equipment, etc. As an arts organisation we worked with the arts suggestions, with more involvement from the community by this stage. The Planning for Real process had introduced us to the community in a way people could understand and trust. The arts issues were put in the context of all the other day-to-day issues and people began to feel more interested in what we could offer them and heartened by the positive outcome of the Planning for Real process.

BRINGING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, USING ART AS THE VEHICLE

Our next step was to take a local legend and develop a celebration of it. We used the story of Jack'o'Legs to catch people's interest. He was a local Robin Hood who stole from the rich on the A1 nearby, lived in a cave, was killed by some angry bakers and buried in his own fourteen foot long grave in Weston Churchyard. A colourful story, conveniently located. The Jack'o'Legs Experience developed into a re-enactment starting in the churchyard, followed by a guided walk from Weston to Graveley along the footpath, with a countryside expert, ending with a giant puppet welcome, free mulled wine, the official tasting of the Jack'o'Legs Loaf cooked by the local bakers making their amends, and Jack'o'Legs shadow play performed by local people.

The event goes on in the sense that the actors who performed at the churchside have since written two more plays about local legends and are touring them to local libraries. And there are hopes the Jack'o'Legs Experience might become an annual event.

Footsteps carries on in the form of improvements to the path, including gates and signs. The footpath has connections with E.M Forster and there have been successful funding bids for signs to explain the background to the path.

USING ART AS THE VEHICLE FOR INCREASING UNDERSTANDING AND AWARENESS

Participating in arts activities requires a lot from an individual. It requires a person really to absorb their surrounding through all five senses, to make selections, meanings and interpretations of the world from their own experience. It requires investigating things in minute detail and yet also being able to take in large views and concepts in one gulp. Using the arts in the countryside enables people to experience, interpret and personalise the countryside. It makes it meaningful. Anyone who has ever spent hours painting a landscape will never forget the detail in their mind's eye. By being able to create something from the experience of being in the countryside a person begins a relationship, and interaction where the countryside is something valuable to them. If there is a personal relationship between people and their environment then there is an investment for those same people to look after it. Therefore the arts is a legitimate vehicle for increasing people's connection with the countryside and not just a face-painting exercise.

Footsteps, like many other projects around the world, has brought people closer to their local countryside using the arts. It has celebrated the stories unique to the neck of the woods and has helped to develop a sense of community. It has laid the groundwork for greater awareness and understanding of the countryside by the local communities. In this sense, Footsteps is a positive step in making a difference at a local level and therefore ultimately at a global level.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Simon Fenoulhet

Deputy Director, Cywaith Cymru.Artworks Wales

Public art is only as interesting as the brief that is given to the artist. We are always looking for ways to extend the role of the artist beyond the commemorative or civic into a wider role of interpreter, because the real skill that artists have is as interpreters of ideas. An idea or a piece of history need not be fixed to the page; it can be much more vivid when it is brought to life through an individual artist's interpretation.

The public nature of our projects is not tokenism. We want people to be directly involved with the decision-making process that shapes their environment, helping to choose appropriate projects as well as selecting the artists they want to work with. Sometimes commissions serve a specific purpose to celebrate an event in history or to improve an otherwise drab environment, while others exist for their own sake. Works can be on any scale, discretely fitting in with their surroundings or standing out from it when they need to assert their separateness.

Whatever the location, the context is all important in that it provides the frame of reference. Artists need to respect and reflect the environment they are working in as that is the best way to ensure that works of art created for a particular place are accepted by the community and earn the right to remain. There are fewer restrictions when works are temporary and it can create more possibilities for creativity, knowing that an installation or a piece of sculpture can be fragile instead of vandal-proof. Because of this, site specific exhibitions in managed countryside offer some of the most exciting opportunities for artists, exploring new ways of looking at the landscape.

We are happy to take over almost any location, provided that there is good public access; in fact the wider variety of sites and locations creates a whole new audience for public art. Working outside the gallery on other people's territory does mean taking that site 'ownership' into account. There is no such thing as neutral land. Each territory carries with it its own history and folklore, and in South Wales especially the landscape has been shaped and re-shaped by heavy industry, creating a very scarred and sometimes artificial looking environment.

To the artist this is a rich source of ideas and references which guides the choice of subject matter and materials with which to work. Ideally, we would like artists to be involved in the aesthetics of land reclamation itself, rather than simply providing add-on art once the engineers have finished; that way the landscape of the valleys might be re-invested with meaning and resonance rather than the anonymous forms of the engineer.

Occasionally we have the opportunity to work in areas of great natural beauty, where there is a good deal of sensitivity about the look of things. The artist's skills of observation and interpretation are a way of drawing out what is particular to a place in its geology or plant life and presenting it in a way which adds to rather than detracts from the experience of nature.

PROJECT CHECKLIST

- Create a **vision** for your project. Decide what kind of art you want. Ensure it is a shared vision!
- Set out your **aims and objectives** clearly in terms of audience, purpose, economic benefit, etc.
- Plan your **community** involvement and consultation. Identify potential collaborators.
- Use the above to prepare a **fundraising** document with accurate costings and timetable.
- Assuming you are successful, form a **steering group** of key people so that there is collective responsibility in choosing an artist and continuity for the project.
- Make a **contract** with your artist, setting out responsibilities on both sides.
- **Monitor** the progress of the project and review its successes and failures.

As an example, I want to describe a project at Parc Glynllifon in Gwynedd which we've been working on for some years. Glynllifon is a large country house and estate owned by Gwynedd County Council. We were approached in 1985 with the idea that the grounds could be developed as a sculpture park, which was quite a fashionable idea at the time. The main building is used as an agricultural college while most of the other buildings and landscape features were falling into disrepair. The park already had a number of interesting features such as fountains, a grotto, controlled vistas and areas of managed

parkland which had been developed over the years but which by now were all but forgotten.

Our response was that the most appropriate route would be to build on the tradition of landscape works already there and to invite artists to work in collaboration with landscape architects to create new features as an integral part of the park. At that point it became clear just how big a job it would be and that in order to have a long term future, a strategy would need to be drawn up. This detail is important because the long term plans to this day are fuelled by that report which researched not only the nuts and bolts of how to do it, but also the particular culture of that region and how the literature in particular had played such an important role in giving form to the history and culture of the Gwynedd.

In fact, children's literature was the starting point with a brief to artists to commemorate writing for children. The design team, including an environmental artist, a landscape architect and a sculptor. The design team came up with a scheme which included a story telling area to be used by local schools, a children's mountain which contained within it a secret chamber where local children had donated toys and precious objects to be built into its walls.

"Mynydd bach is a children's mountain and is also meant to be an acknowledgement of the power and magic that mountains have and continue to hold in Celtic folklore, mythology and in particular children's literature of many cultures"

Ian Hunter – Environmental Artist.

From the mountain, a path spirals out into the woods to a mirrored monolith, a kind of doorway to the imagination which reflects the surroundings but which invites you to pass into an imagined world.

"From the start I felt that I would like to see a path through the wood. Venturing along it you find strange transforming things, as you do when you journey through a good story."

Denys Short – Artist.

The purpose of the work is to feed the imagination and to provide a place where stories can be told as part of a living culture. The essence of the project has been the collaboration between people from different backgrounds and disciplines to create something which adds meaning and vitality to the culture of Gwynedd.

"Our conscious task has been to read these marks upon the land so that we may understand the language of the landscape and place it beside the language of literature. It

became evident early in our discussions that formality of the park required a magical influence which was recognisable and meaningful.”

Robert Camlin – Landscape Architect.

There is also a site dedicated to drama in the form of an amphitheatre, where plays and music are performed to local audiences. The very existence of this unique venue encourages new writing as well as providing a venue for traditional work. It isn't apparent to the casual visitor that they are looking at the work of an artist. Each site is a synthesis of land form, sculpture and metaphor which is in keeping with the traditions of landscape works already present in Glynllifon. Their originality lies in the fact that they are a contemporary interpretation of the garden environment which are rooted in the indigenous culture of the region.

GROUNDWORK AND THE COMMUNITY

DEVELOPING A LONG TERM APPROACH

Peter Williams
Director, Groundwork Caerphilly

GROUNDWORK

Established in 1981, Groundwork is the leading UK environmental partnership organisation, active in over 120 towns and cities.

There are currently forty-five Groundwork Trusts within the UK network, employing seven hundred staff. Each Trust is an independent not-for-profit organisation and registered charity. The areas include inner city, urban fringe and countryside and are predominantly places where the quality of life is poor due to a combination of economic, social and environmental problems. Groundwork has a national office based in Birmingham.

Groundwork's approach is to devise programmes which help people improve the environmental, social and economic prospects of their area and contribute to sustainable development. These programmes concentrate on four key themes:

- **bringing about physical environmental improvements**

cleaning up the environmental problems and dereliction inherited from the past and finding new productive uses for the land and buildings left behind; putting the 'green heart' back into towns and run-down housing estates
- **environmental education and community involvement**

helping people to improve their neighbourhoods and communities and to participate in making and managing new landscapes and community facilities; promoting training through environmental improvements; creating opportunities for more people to understand and enjoy the environment

- **integrating the economy and the environment**

raising awareness that good environments are good for business, especially targeting small and medium-sized companies; improving the environmental performance of business, securing business involvement and support for the wider regeneration effort, linking business with the local community

- **conserving natural resources**

helping people to make more sustainable choices about what they consume and enabling them to develop life-styles which have less environmental impact

At a local level, Groundwork is a multi-sector partnership bringing together people from local authorities, business, the voluntary sector and the local community, who wish to see the environmental and economic prospects of their area improved.

In this vital regeneration work Groundwork enjoys the support of over one hundred local authorities and thirty-two major national companies in the UK.

Significant funding is also received from government departments and agencies, including the Department of the Environment, the Welsh Office, the Countryside Commission and Countryside Council for Wales, the European Union, English Nature, English Partnerships and the Rural Development Commission.

GROUNDWORK AND THE COMMUNITY - THE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

The Groundwork approach to environmental regeneration is now well established and widely regarded as a highly effective networking initiative based on key principles of partnership, community involvement and commitment, practical action and sustainability.

The Partnership approach, once innovative, is now becoming mainstream and accepted and is reflected in Central Government programmes and policies, in local authorities assuming more of an enabling role and in the emphasis of statutory and voluntary organisations. Above all, there is a growing sense that our approach of involving and empowering people, of relating the physical environment to social and economic concerns, is accepted and recognised as of wider relevance.

The issues likely to be at the forefront of the national agenda over the next twenty years are ones Groundwork has been tackling already and with some success. This is true both of issues which are familiar but which continue to cause concern (such as unemployment, training and job creation, youth crime and industry's impact on the environment) and of

new issues which the Government and other agencies have already begun to address (such as engaging people in moving towards sustainable development and winning the commitment of small and medium-sized business to environmental management).

The Partnership approach is not only flourishing in Groundwork areas but becoming more influential locally, nationally and even internationally. The key to the approach is creating opportunities for local involvement and participation; Groundwork brings together the local community, local authorities, business and voluntary bodies in a strong working partnership.

Today myself and Mick Petts, Environmental Artist with Groundwork Caerphilly, will give a brief introduction to how environmental arts have been used by Groundwork as a powerful mechanism for engaging local people in improving and managing their local environment. We also aim to illustrate something of the process and our partners and how underpinning all our work is a commitment to listening to common-sense ideas for change, which exist among people in every local community, and then putting the expertise of the Trust (and in this case an Environmental Artist) at their disposal, to make things happen.

BRINGING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DOWN TO EARTH

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

(World Commission on Environment and Development)

In the past decade we have seen the beginnings of a seed change in the way we see our role as custodians of the environment and of stewardship. Once seen as the preserve of experts, dedicated environmentalists, specialists and enthusiasts the environment has now become everyone's business and concern. But this latent interest and awareness has to be converted into a positive determination to bring about change, if sustainability is to have any meaning.

That is why the role of the local facilitator and, increasingly, Environmental Artists is vital to a continual process of transforming attitudes and behaviour.

The project officer with a Groundwork Trust or similar organisation, or an Environmental Artist, may sometimes take the lead as an innovator and sometimes play a complementary part, recognising that each partner, whatever the project, has their own objectives, and uses the skills and experience of all these partners to add value, getting the best possible outcome through the pooling of resources.

The Groundwork network is but one of the mechanisms for change and there are many other imaginative and effective local groups pursuing similar goals and approaches. Groundwork believes that a sustainable world needs a massive replication of this approach, and that Environmental Artists can play a key role in bringing this about.

SUSTAINABLE ART

Many of the Groundwork Trusts throughout the UK are increasingly seeing various art activities, and environmental art in particular, as an essential part of their community programmes. Trusts have worked with artists using video, mural and mosaics, drama and performance art, sculpture trails and milestones, artist blacksmiths and storytelling. Most significantly a whole generation of Environmental Artists like Mick Petts, Paul Davies, Ian Hunter, of Projects Environment, Dilys Jackson, currently based with Groundwork Ogwr, and Alain Ayres in West Cumbria have found a receptive home for their artistic visions and creative work, in partnership with Groundwork and local communities.

For example, the longest sculpture trail in Europe is being created in the Irwell Valley. Groundwork has teamed up with the North West Arts Board to set up Groundwork Arts in the North West (GAIN). The Way stretches from Manchester through Salford and Bury into Rossendale and up into the Pennines above Bacup. GAIN's Environmental Arts Manager says, "All the sculptures refer to the landscape and heritage of the Valley. They both create and celebrate a sense of place, and help to involve people with their landscapes."

From our own perspective in the South Wales Valley, we appointed Mick Petts as an Artist in Residence with Groundwork Caerphilly, because he was a craftsman who works mainly with natural materials, drawing forms from the earth (as with Earth Mother Sculpture at Ebbw Vale Green Festival) or by growing them into shape with a range of living willow sculptures, of which you will see a number of examples today. Mick Petts excels in animating people and unlocking their creativity and potential, and creates sculptures and artworks that are both functional and aesthetic - play structures, seating, shelters, waymarks and community meeting places. These projects ideally meet the needs and aims of an organisation like Groundwork and more importantly meet the aspirations of local people, creating sustainable artworks in terms of function, and local ownership and aftercare.

In our case we required an extremely flexible artist acting as designer, planner, workshop facilitator, community enabler, youthworker, craftsman, contractor and project manager. Artists are required to find new ways of engaging people's awareness of the environment, understanding and interpreting a changing landscape, a sense of place and the social and cultural inheritance of their communities.

From Groundwork's experience, Environmental Artists should really be given at least equal status with other professional partners they are asked to work with, whether Planners, Countryside Managers, Landscape Architects or Engineers, and we would see their role as central to any Local or National Agenda 21 programme, as we move towards the next millennium.

For further information on Groundwork or Environmental Artists within the Groundwork Network contact:-

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Telephone 01495 222605

ART OFF THE GROUND

*Shelagh Hourahane
Consultant, CAE.heuad*

“Art Off the Ground” on Day Two of the Workshop was an exercise in the practical application of the principles, ideas and procedures that had been discussed on the previous day.

The exercise was designed to:

- * provide an opportunity for participants to work through a brief so that they were aware of the various stages of development required in such situations
- * provide a model for collaborative working in which the participants would be able to contribute from their own expertise and would also learn something of the field of expertise owned by others in their 'team'
- * provide a framework within which participants would be able to learn through using the knowledge of the various consultants who were available to advise and give specific information

The outcome of the exercise was:

- * for each team to produce a vision for their proposed brief, together with a plan for its implementation, consideration of potential partnerships, suggestions for funding and a strategy for community involvement where appropriate
- * for each team to make a presentation of the above at the end of the session, followed by feedback and discussion with the whole group

THE EXERCISES

The following briefs are hypothetical; they describe situations created for the event.

BRIEF A: The History Trail

There is a plan to develop a cycle/walking trail along the Glamorgan coast and part of the route takes cyclists and walkers from Llantwit Major to Monkash.

This route is of particular historic interest, especially as it links several ancient churches and the communities surrounding them. There is already a *Heritage Coast Route* which links these churches with others on the coast, and also an historic walk through Llantwit Major. However, the various authorities, local interests and landowners involved feel that more could be done to make the route attractive to tourists and locals, and to interpret the route in a more interesting and challenging manner, by **paying attention to the historic landscape and its environmental value.**

A consortium of consultants, who among them possess a wide range of expertise and skills, has been asked to prepare a plan for the creative and interpretative development of the route. The consortium consists of people with a background in countryside management, planning, the creative arts, community action and fundraising.

The brief to the consortium is to produce a plan which has both a vision and a practical application, **although the brief stipulates that artists must be involved in this project.** However, there is no existing idea that the concept should involve any specific art form or that work by artists should necessarily be permanent in character.

As it is about halfway along the route, it has been decided that St. Donat's should be a focal point for interpretation of the route. There is, therefore, the stipulation to concentrate on the church of St. Donat's and its immediate surroundings as a special site for interpretation.

However, they are asked to bear in the following factors in mind:

- * Access to the site is from a minor road and is not easily seen by passing traffic. There is a right of way to the church, but the land around is owned by Atlantic College.
- * Appropriate partnerships must be made with various local interests.
- * The community of St. Donat's has raised £5,000 of the £15,000 available for the project, and therefore it must be involved in some way.

- * An interpretative element must be involved in at least some of the art work which will develop the theme of the historic landscape.

The consortium is asked to produce:

- * A vision for the project
- * A plan for its implementation
- * A proposal for community involvement
- * Some outline proposals for the creative works.

The consortium is asked to make a presentation which focuses on the above but which also considers any other elements or factors which might be important.

Proposals for Brief A

- 1 The team saw the **key element** in the brief as being “how to make the route more attractive and informative for the public through interpretation.”
They analysed the **specific objectives** as being:
 - * To enrich the experience of walking the 'way'
 - * To involve community participation at all stages
 - * To contribute to the economic and environmental sustainability of the area

- 2 **The vision** for this project was focused on the **idea of pilgrimage**. Not only would this include the more obvious context in which the church of St. Donat's and the other churches along the route had been centres of pilgrimage, but introduced the idea that present day walkers/cyclists might be on a type of pilgrimage which was concerned with the environment, culture or personal discovery of place.

The 'pilgrimage' focus for St.Donat's was envisaged as a stage in a possible long pilgrimage route through South Wales to St.David's.

The **interpretive artwork** was envisaged as including:

- * Waymarkers, which might be collectible items, in the sense that rubbings could be made as one went along to create a record of the journey.
- * Use of local materials, e.g. stone.
Use of local resources, e.g. Ewenny Pottery.
- * Series of accumulative Waymarkers – each one representing a different element in the church building, which would fit together to make a whole picture of the church by the time of arrival.

- * Other ways in which the elements might be linked for the different 'pilgrimage' themes.
- * Waymarkers would be entirely visual in order to avoid the problems of several languages. There would supplementary printed leaflets available from tourism centres and in the churches, etc.

3 **The Implementation**

It was realised that it would be necessary to know exactly what the Glamorgan Heritage Coast strategy is for development and interpretation.

4 **Community Involvement**

The project would begin with a 'walk-in' - a local community walk of the 'pilgrimage' route.

- * An open competition would be launched to initiate the design process.
- * There would an artist in residence in local schools to work on the design process with pupils.
- * Community action would be further harnessed by the development of cyclical or annual events/exhibitions associated with the theme and the project.

5 **Funding**

The team saw the potential for turning the given budget of £15,000 into about £60,000. The main proposal for this was to use the money as a proportion to apply for European Funding, especially in connection with community development and schools involvement.

BRIEF B: The Watchtower Trail

There is currently access by a right of way from the B road through St. Donat's hamlet to St. Donat's church. The College have agreed with the local authority that this right of way should be extended to go past the old 'mill' and watchtower, to link up with the existing Heritage Coast path.

The woodland area around the 'mill' and watchtower is currently being cleared and it is thought that it would be appropriate to commission an artist/artists to work with the management team to develop this walk and to be involved with a interpretative project.

Before work can proceed the management group is asked to produce a plan for how the work can be achieved and to concentrate especially on the way in which an

artist/artists can be involved and what will be the practical and financial implications of this part of the scheme.

The team is asked to bear certain factors in mind:

- * Access to the new stretch of footpath is by concession from the College.
- * Appropriate partnerships or consultation must be made with local interests.
- * The old buildings, especially the watchtower, which are sited near the path are potentially dangerous for the public.
- * Attention must be paid to the environmental character and importance of the site.

The team is asked to produce:

- * A vision for the project
- * A plan for its implementation
- * A funding strategy
- * Some outline proposals for creative interpretation

The consortium is asked to make a presentation which focuses on the above but which also considers any other elements or factors which might be important.

Proposals for Brief B

- 1 The team presented the proposals for this brief from the point of view of Atlantic College, as the landowner involved. The College was envisaged as perceiving a problem in the public's desire to have access through this part of the grounds onto the coastal path and especially to see the watchtower.

The problem was identified as the low standard of the woodland paths, the need to manage the woodland itself and the dangerous condition of the watchtower and of the ruined parsonage. The latter was currently a venue for the occasional 'lager party'.

The College saw an opportunity in the proposal to create public access to the coast path and to provide some interpretive art work in conjunction with it.

- 2 The vision for the interpretive work was linked with the perceived need to make the section of the path leading to the watchtower safer. It is currently steep, eroded and slippery. The idea was to make this section safer by making steps, which would be linked by ramps and steps.

The sides of the steps would be made of stone into which would be carved images based on two appropriate themes. It was suggested that these should be:

- * The arrival of the daughter of Caractacus and the bringing of Christianity to the area (steps down).
- * The development of fossils, found on the nearby beach (steps up).
- * The steps themselves would relate to the particular strata of the cliffs.

- 3 The implementation was conceived in three phases:

- * Phase 1
An artist in residence for one year (£16,000), to design and carve the steps
Continuation of general work on the paths (£1,000)
Construction of steps and installation of carvings (£12,000)
Temporary security on buildings (£2,0000)
Free sponsorship for stone/cement from Aberthaw Cement Co. (local business)
- * Phase 2
Survey of the watchtower (£2,000)
Survey of the old parsonage (£1,000)

(Total: £50,000)

- * Phase 3
Restoration of the watchtower
Restoration of the parsonage, which was envisaged as becoming an informal space for use in an educational context connected with the themed walk or for special workshops/events.
There was some discussion about the possibility that the Parsonage should alternatively be restored first in order to act as a workshop for the artist in residence during the first year.
No budget was identified for Phase 3.

- 4 As part of the implementation plan a list of potential partners was made. These included:
Students and staff of Atlantic College

Local authority/Heritage Coast management
Local residents
CADW
Arts Council of Wales (for the artist in residence)
Wales Tourist Board
The Church in Wales
Countryside Council for Wales
Local Wildlife Group

It was suggested that it would be necessary to set up a steering group for the project and that these interests would each want to have a place on it.

5 Funding strategy:

The lead organisation was identified as Atlantic College and it was indicated that this project would be a part of its 35th year celebrations.

Other sources of funding identified were:

The local authority

The Lottery (Heritage Fund), for the watchtower restoration

The Arts Council of Wales, for residency funding (it was indicated that this funding would be applied for as a 50% partnership and that educational opportunities and local access would be two of the likely conditions of funding)

The Lottery (Arts Fund), for the work on the steps

BRIEF C: Shore and Castle Project

In 1997 Atlantic College want to mark the 35th anniversary of the establishment of the College with a celebratory project which involves a creative artist/artists in residence at the College and the students.

The College has no preconceived notions about what kind of works should be produced or even whether they should be permanent in character. They do, however, want the project to make links between the castle site and the shoreline and to draw attention to the differences between the more designed garden type landscape around the castle and the open shore.

The College has asked consultants to make suggestions about how this project can be achieved. The following points have to be taken into consideration:

- * As many of the students as possible have to be involved in the project.
- * There is a budget of £3,000 in the College funds already, but more fundraising will have to be included in the project plan.
- * Artworks and project activities must be appropriate and non-damaging to the site.
- * There must be a publicity/public relations element which will be useful to the profile of the College in the adjoining community and further afield.

The team is asked to produce:

- * A vision for the project
- * A plan for its implementation
- * A funding strategy
- * Proposals for the involvement of students in the project
- * Some outline proposals for creative interpretation

The consortium is asked to make a presentation which focuses on the above but which also considers any other elements or factors which might be important.

Proposals for Brief C

- 1 **The context in which this project was envisaged** was that of an international festival to celebrate thirty-five years of the United World College Movement. The concept was to “celebrate the boundless and the finite through the Atlantic Sea to the World.”
- 2 **The vision** was to initiate thirty-five events to take place throughout 1997. Some of these would take place outside the grounds of St. Donat's and they would even connect with past students who had gone back to their own countries. Some of the ideas to be considered would be:

Performances	A staircase into the sea
Tree planting	Depiction of sea creatures
Fire & flotillas on the sea	Story telling of international myths of the sea
Time line 1962-1997	Place a fossil in the new Arts Centre
Remote web-radio/press/film	Sculpture within the sea eroding over the year

Yearbook of the events	Events around the world
Women's singing in the loo	Use of discrete spaces for events
Artists from 35 countries	Use of ages within the gardens

- 3 **Implementation** would be carried out through a steering group made up of representatives of the staff, students, ground staff, local people and Arts Centre staff and artists as necessary.

All the students would be encouraged to contribute ideas and would be given specific areas to work on. The project would be a part of the regular extra-curricular activity undertaken by the students. They would be involved with all stages of the process - planning, fundraising, publicity.

Establish a website to contact and keep previous students all over the world in touch with the project.

4 **Funding**

A wide range of funding possibilities were considered. These were:

- The Arts Lottery Fund
- Former students
- European Funding
- Erasmus - European educational funding
- Arts Council of Wales
- Sponsorship by local companies
- Welsh Development Agency
- The Queen
- Corporate sponsors
- Prince's Trust
- The United Nations
- The Laing Corporation

GENERAL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS ON "ART OFF THE GROUND"

- * The workshop was generally successful and produced some very creative and practical ideas.
- * However, at least a full day was needed in order to follow through the idea properly.
- * None of the teams identified any need for project management, other than a steering group and student contributions. In this context, the role of

public art organisations, such as Cywaith Cymru Artworks Wales as project managers and fundraisers was not fully appreciated.

- * Any future workshops based on this idea need to be better resourced in respect of background material on existing local plans for the management, development and interpretation of sites, community background information, detailed maps and local organisations.
- * The success of "Art Off the Ground" did suggest that the opportunity for those working in countryside management and in the arts to work together in this way is beneficial and could provide a useful model for future workshops and even for developing actual projects.

'A Brush with the Land'
Atlantic College
21-22 May 1996

Day 1

- 0930 Registration
- 1030 Welcome
Richard Broadhurst, Chair, Countryside Recreation Network
- 1045 **To a purpose! Why do we do it?**
A look at the interaction of art and the countryside, at interpretation and the community
Shelagh Hourahane, CAE.heuad
- 1115 **Making connections**
Planning a real project with a real community
Tamara Edwards-Playne, Stevenage Artscape
- 1145 **Breaking down barriers**
Putting together successful commissions
Simon Fenoulhet, Cywaith Cymru.Artworks Wales
- 1215 Break
- 1230 **Developing a long-term approach**
Groundwork and the community
Peter Williams, Groundwork Caerphilly
- 1300 Lunch
- 1400 **Session 1**
The whole afternoon will be spent on one of two workshops:
- Living Willow (sculpture)**
Mick Petts, Environmental artist-in residence, Groundwork Caerphilly
- Views and Vista (mono-prints)**
Tamara Edwards-Playne, Stevenage Artscape
- 1730 **Sand Castles in the Air!**
An evening barbecue will be followed by a participative workshop

‘A Brush with the Land’
Atlantic College
21–22 May 1996

Day 2

- 0900 **Session 2: Art off the ground!**
An introduction
Mick Petts, Environmental artist-in residence, Groundwork
Caerphilly
- 0930 **Session 2: Art off the ground!**
Working through the entire process: vision, plan, funds, people,
publicity, timing and putting it all together. Each group will work
throughout the entire process using ‘consultants’ to help and advise.
- 1400 **Feedback / surgery session**
Get advice and thoughts: discussion of your own projects and ideas!
- 1530 Close and depart

The Countryside Recreation Network is committed to
**exchanging and spreading information to develop best
policy and practice in countryside recreation**

Patricia Avery
Senior Lecturer
UWIC

Wendy Earle
Sculptor

Liz Bayley
Arts Development Officer
Bromsgrove District Council

Tamara Edwards-Playne
Publicity & Admin Manager
Stevenage Artscape

Lynne Bebb
Freelance
Artist

Catherine Etchell
Network Manager
Countryside Recreation Network

Richard Broadhurst
Senior Adviser
Forestry Commission

Simon Fenoulhet
Deputy Director
Cywaith Cymru.Artsworks Wales

Fiona Clayton
Rural Arts Fieldworker
Stratford-on-Avon District Council

Pete Frost
Senior Community Action Officer
Countryside Council for Wales

Sally Collins
Student
Wolverhampton University

Tina Gower
Environmental Outreach Officer
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Anna Douglas
Project Co-ordinator
Visual Arts Development Agency

Richard Harris
Artist

Peter Downes
Countryside Development Officer
London Borough of Enfield

Shelagh Hourahane
Consultant
CAE.heud

Sandra Lynch
Conservation Policy & Advice Group
Countryside Council for Wales

Mick Petts
Environmental artist-in-residence
Groundwork Caerphilly

Karen Tharp
Artist

Chris Thomas
Lecturer
Staffordshire University

Steven Westwood
West Highland Way Path Manager
Loch Lomond Park Authority

Robert Wilkins
Countryside Officer
Hereford and Worcester C C

Peter Williams
Director
Groundwork Caerphilly

Hazel Winder
Area Ranger
Peak Park Joint Planning Board

APPENDIX

LIST OF WILLOW GROWERS AND SUPPLIERS

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