



**CORSHAM TOWN COUNCIL  
PUBLIC ART STRATEGY 2020-2024**

**APPROVED - JUNE 2020**



# Corsham Town Council - Public Art Strategy 2020-2024

## Executive Summary

This strategy has been created as a result of the aims and objectives of the Town Council's two Strategic Plans (2014-2018 and 2018-2022), and the Corsham Creative Strategy (2017-2022).

It is informed by current national and local Planning policies, new development opportunities for Corsham, and current good practice in commissioning arts in the public realm.

The strategy has been developed through discussions with residents, officers, Councillors, Wiltshire Council's Arts Lead, and current members of the Arts organisations in the town, namely Bath Spa University and Pound Arts.

The Strategy aims to ensure that the potential benefits of increased public art activity are maximised for Corsham and its population by:

- Coordinating how Arts funds are spent across the community.
- Ensuring that all projects are integrated in the town's development plans.
- Working in partnership with the community, public and private sectors.
- Creating work of high quality: durable and easy to maintain, and which fits well with the local area.
- Offering commission prospects for the considerable local artistic talent locally.
- Identifying and implementing good commissioning practices.

When Corsham Town Council published its Creative Corsham Strategy 2017-2022 it was intended:

**'To grow and celebrate cultural and creative activity in Corsham, so that by 2022 the town and local area is regionally recognised as a centre of excellence in the Arts and Creative Industries, and to develop our cultural assets to make a real difference to the economy of Corsham and the surrounding villages, to the lives of the people who live here and those who work and visit here.'**

This is still the intention and the subsequent sections set out how this might be achieved in the next five years.

## Public Art in Corsham

### 1. Background

Corsham has a strong, and historical, reputation for the Arts. The famous Bath Academy of Art was based in the town. The Academy was established by Lord Methuen – the artist Paul Ayshford - at Corsham Court where he lived in 1946 and provided higher education in specialist art and design, teacher training, performing arts and combined arts. The Academy then became Bath School of Art and Design, which is now part of Bath Spa University (BSU) and is based at its Sion Hill campus in the city. The University left Corsham Court in 1986 but returned in 2008. Their Corsham Court campus is now BSU's centre for postgraduate research and taught postgraduate programmes such as creative writing, children's literature and the environmental humanities.

Alongside this the town can boast the Pound Arts Centre as the hub of Corsham's Arts offering. The Centre is the site for live theatre, music and comedy, as well as film screenings, exhibitions, dance performances and more. It is also home to three artists in residence at any one time. The Pound also holds two festivals a year – Blue Sky in June and Magic and Mayhem in November - as well as being the coordinators for a number of other events and being responsible for the Rural Touring programme covering Wiltshire and South Gloucestershire.

The Peacock Arts Trail, established in 2013, on a volunteer basis, by a group of local artists, aims to promote the Arts in Corsham and North West Wiltshire. The Trail takes place every two years and is strongly supported by Corsham Town Council and other stakeholders. As well as Corsham, the Trail includes artists in Box, Yatton Keynell, Chippenham, Kington Langley and Holt. In 2019 four artists were hosted at the Town Hall.

Corsham is also home to a number of artists and creative practitioners, covering every aspect of the Arts, at all levels, from dance to theatre, digital design to fine art, ceramics to sculpture.

Corsham Town Council's first Strategic Plan, 2014-2018, looked to the future with an ambitious five-year vision under the theme: Alive with Centres of Excellence From the work done towards the aims and objectives of the theme (*Appendix 1*), came the Creative Corsham Strategy 2017-2022. That document's Action Plan highlighted how the Arts could be incorporated into many aspects of the Strategic Plan, particularly within the theme of Managed Development, including:

*Develop a sculpture trail through the town centre and outwards to the surrounding settlements, ideally showcasing the area's finest Bath Stone.*

*Consider producing a Public Art Strategy, which will include the encouragement of public art installations within new developments.*

This Public Art Strategy aims to continue the work set out in the Creative Corsham Strategy, and address progress on Public Art plans in the coming years.

## **2. Definition of Public Art**

Public art is any media that has been planned and executed with the intention of being staged in the physical public domain, usually outside and accessible to all. Where public art is physical in nature, it must always be publicly visible. Corsham Town Council's Creative Corsham Strategy describes it thus: ***Public Art may be temporary or permanent in nature and, as part of an overall programme, consideration can be given to extend the definition of Public Art to include temporary events, festivals, activities or temporary installations.***

## **3. Neighbourhood Plan**

Corsham's Neighbourhood Plan was 'made' (adopted) following a referendum in November 2019. The Plan encourages the installation of public art in the town, particularly within new developments.

*Health and Wellbeing Key Objective HWKO14: Incorporate appropriate Public Art into new developments.*

*Policy CNP HW6: Where appropriate the inclusion of public art within the context of the proposal site itself will be supported. Public art should reflect those founding elements unique to Corsham such as wool, stone, military links and communications and should contribute towards the delivery of the Creative Corsham Strategy 2017-2022.*

The Plan's Heritage section also states:

*The Corsham Neighbourhood Plan aims to maintain and enhance the town in a way which respects its heritage and environment and promotes a positive sense of place and thriving cultural life for all sectors of the community. The Plan recognises that a wide range of features in the natural and built environment contribute to its attractiveness and distinctive character and landscape. The Plan policies demonstrate the value of Corsham's historic and cultural inheritance, and help conserve its historic buildings and settings, ensuring they remain in productive use.*

*All new development within the Corsham Neighbourhood Plan Area must demonstrate good quality design. This means responding to, and integrating with, natural as well as the existing built environment. Planning permission will not be supported for development that fails to improve the form and function of the Corsham Neighbourhood Plan Area.*

*Innovative proposals which add to the vitality of Corsham will be supported provided design, scale, materials, colours and proportion respect the prevailing historic context.*

#### **4. Public Realm**

Public art, as already described, can of course encompass more than just sculpture or a piece of stand-alone art. Works in the public realm including signage, waymarking, kerbing, street furniture and stone finishes all present opportunities to replace functional prosaic objects with designs which are unique, interesting and original. They can also serve to create a unique feel to a place, enhance the visual appearance of the public realm and demonstrate the artistic creativity of a town.

Examples of public art within the public realm could include:

- Specialist treatment of some aspects of a building – stained glasswork, mosaics, floor/wall design, lighting or timberwork.
- Provision of hard or soft landscaping, paving, gates, arches, seating, play areas and bridges.
- Interpretation of a specific site or place.
- Provision of space for artistic use.
- Major landmark or urban design features, especially at gateways to the town or prominent public spaces.

Corsham Town Council has developed a Public Realm Strategy which it is committed to delivering. The main focus of the Strategy is currently the Town Centre, including parts of Newlands Road and Pickwick Road and encompassing pedestrian links into the town. The aim is to improve the visual appearance of the area, marking the presence of an historic, interesting High Street and encouraging people to use the town centre. The Strategy also looks to make improvements at prominent public areas and gateways to the town for example a project at the Cross Keys is about to commence (June 2020) consisting of new surfacing, planting, a dry stone wall and piece of public art.

## 5. The Value of Public Art

All public art in Corsham should aim to:

- Enrich the town's unique identity.
- Support personal well-being - a strong arts and cultural offer makes people feel more content.
- Develop the physical environment by adding interest, quality and distinctiveness.
- Provide an opportunity for people to come together and feel part of their community, encouraging a stronger attachment to the town.
- Add to the enjoyment and interest of local people and visitors.
- Make the town an attractive/interesting place in which to settle.

Individual pieces of art might also:

- Add marker points in the town and create visual landmarks.
- Celebrate existing local artistic talent and encourage new creativity, as well as providing employment opportunities for Corsham's creative sector.
- Generate excitement and encourage debate and discussion.
- Create heritage sites of the future.
- Celebrate Corsham's history.

## 6. Examples of Existing Art in Corsham



*The Wiltshire Lion, Jonathan Sanders*



*Lionardo, Caroline Rudge*



*'Plastic Fantastic' Birds, Anya Beaumont and Local Primary Schools*



*Martingate Mural, Rob Cowan*

Other examples of Public Art in the town include two more murals in the Martingate Centre (a peacock by Phoebe Tonkin and a rooftop view by Rob Cowan); a peacock mosaic above the Town Council's noticeboard in Martingate and the original quarrying truck (renovated by the members of the Brunel Shed) at Springfield Campus. There have been many temporary Public Art installations in the town, usually linked to The Pound's festivals or art exhibitions, as well as a commemorative poppy installation, by Emma Leith, as part of the Town Council's Above and Beyond exhibition to commemorate the town's First World War hospital.

## **7. Priority Sites for Future Public Art**

Clearly with an ambitious list of aspirations but finite resources, a programme of works needs to be devised and prioritised. Our current thinking is that entrance points to the town centre are a priority for consideration and, to that end, Cross Keys on the A4 was commissioned in 2019. The 'Peace Feathers' creation, by Jane Rickards is a sculpted piece and is due for installation during late Summer/early Autumn 2020.

At its November 2019 meeting, The Town Council's Community Services Committee was presented with a list of potential Public Art sites (*Appendix 2*) for discussion. At its subsequent meeting, in January 2020, the Committee was asked to choose its top three sites. The Minutes reported the matter thus:

### **CS 52/19      Public Art Sites**

*Following the commission of the public artwork at Cross Keys and the discussion regarding the list of potential public art sites at November's Community Services Committee meeting, the Committee was asked to choose its top three sites for public art. The 2020/21 budget has an allocation of £10,000 for public artworks. The three selected were: 1) Springfield, 2) Katherine Park and 3) Bradford Road/Triangle. The Bradford Road/Triangle choice would be dependent on the proposed changes in road layout should the Gladman development go ahead but it was felt that this would have been decided by the time art installations at Springfield and Katherine Park had been completed.*

#### **Resolved:**

*That public art installations at the three priority sites be pursued.*

As of June 2020, a Public Art Brief has been prepared for Springfield Recreation Area. It is hoped that the project will be at least part-funded via the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) arising from the Corsham Rise development in Potley. Discussions regarding the use of this money for the project are progressing with Wiltshire Council. The work we hope to commission involves a decorative hedge and improved entranceway for Springfield Campus on the Valley Road approach.

It is hoped that at least one of the sites will be progressed each year, on the basis that the Town Council will continue to allocate funding for Public Art in its annual budgets.

The list of Potential Public Art Sites will be updated as relevant and revisited as appropriate.

## 8. Commissioning Process

Corsham Town Council's commissioning process for Public Artworks is as follows:

- The Arts Officer prepares a brief outlining the project. The brief sets the vision, direction and scope of the commission and can function as a discursive document so that possibilities are not limited and fixed from the start.
- The brief is reviewed by the Head of Community Services, Head of Technical Services and Chief Executive and, if appropriate, the Planning and Events Officer.
- The brief is submitted for approval by Councillors via the Community Services Committee and/or Property and Amenities Committee.
- External critical friends, for example Wiltshire Council's Arts Lead and/or representatives from Pound Arts and Bath Spa University, may be invited to provide their feedback.
- Once approved, the brief is distributed via appropriate and relevant channels. These could include the Arts in Wiltshire blog, The Pound's Visual Arts Officer's database, the Town Council's own databases, Peacock Arts Trail links, Bristol Creatives, the Arts Council, the Town Council's website and social media channels and a call-out in the local Press.
- Expressions of interest will be assessed by a specially commissioned panel which may include Councillors, Officers, Wiltshire Council representatives, The Pound's Visual Arts Officer, representatives from site-specific organisations (for example, housing developers if the final artwork is to be installed as part of a new development).\*
- A proportionate number (depending on the total number of expressions of interest received) are then selected to work up a more detailed research and concept design and are invited to present to a panel, again comprising of relevant personnel (see above). The Town Council will normally cover the costs for the research and concept work at this stage. For Cross Keys, artists were offered £150.
- After the interviews/presentations, the panel will select their favoured artist.
- Subject to contracts, legal agreements, Planning considerations (if necessary), timescales, etc, the artist will be commissioned.
- Local artists are preferred, but not to the detriment of the chosen artwork or ability or experience of the artist.

*\*If community engagement is required, as a condition of CIL funding or other funding streams, at the request of the artist, or at the request of the Town Council (certain sites may lend themselves to more community engagement than others), the Head of Community Services will work with the Arts and Tourism Officer and the artist to create a relevant community engagement plan.*

As an example, during the commissioning process for Cross Keys on the A4 gateway to Corsham, of 11 expressions of interest received, six candidates were invited to come and present in more detail. The selection panel was comprised of: the Chairman of Corsham Town Council, Chair of the Community Services Committee, the Chief Executive, the Head of Technical Services, the Arts and Tourism Officer, Wiltshire Council's Arts Lead and representatives from Pound Arts and Bath Spa University. In this case it was a unanimous decision regarding the candidate selected.

## 9. Current Resources

The Town Council's resources for Public Art are as follows:

- The Arts and Tourism Officer post – 22 hours per week at Corsham Town Council.
- Corsham Town Council budget of £10,00 for 2020/21.
- Wiltshire Council's Arts Lead – As well as being an advocate for the Arts across the county, Wiltshire Council's Arts Lead has responsibility for the implementation and enforcement of Public Art obligations funded via CIL and works with Wiltshire Council's Planning Officers on the requirements for Public Art installations.
- The Pound Arts Centre – Pound Arts and Corsham Town Council have a Service Level Agreement which sees the Town Council give funding to The Pound on an annual basis, with certain conditions. Among many other contributions to the work of the Town Council, The Pound provides suitable entertainment and/or family activities to support the Christmas Lights Switch On and at least one other Corsham Town Council event (eg Taste of Corsham, Summer Fete, Street Fair) each year. In recent years, The Pound's offerings at events has also seen the inclusion of temporary public art and street theatre. The working relationship between both organisations is very strong.
- The Pound Arts Director and Visual Arts Coordinator, both of whom have supported Corsham Town Council with professional expertise when selecting artists for design briefs.
- The Peacock Arts Trail team who are available as 'critical friends' and as a means of sending information to artists.
- A growing group of local artists and creative practitioners to call upon for advice and also use as advocates for the Town Council's projects.

## 10. Next Steps

### **Summer/Autumn 2020**

Installation of 'Peace Feathers' by Jane Rickards at Cross Keys Junction.

### **Late 2020/2021**

Launch of Springfield Recreation Ground Public Art Brief, commissioning process, installation.

### **Events 2021 Onwards**

Incorporate an element of Public Art into as many Town Council events as possible – Taste of Corsham, Summer Fete, Street Fair, StoryTown, Christmas Lights Switch On – whether by working with/funding The Pound, temporary displays of entries in community competitions, or other means.

### **Peacock Arts Trail 2021**

Support the Peacock Arts Trail in its work, both financially and with Officer-time to promote the Trail, host artists and exhibitions at the Town Hall.

### **Katherine Park 2021/2022**

Work on commissioning process for next priority site chosen.



### **Bradford Road/A4 Junction 2022/2023**

Work on commissioning process for third priority site chosen, dependent on outcome of Gladman Planning Appeal and subsequent changes to the road layout.

### **Ongoing**

Chamber Exhibitions at the Town Hall (NB As of June 2020, the Chamber Exhibitions were impacted by the coronavirus crisis. The exhibitions will be re-established as soon as government guidance allows.)

### **Ongoing**

Inclusion of Public Art in Public Realm work.

### **Ongoing**

Liaison with local artists and creative practitioners (possible revival of Arts Café), Bath Spa University, The Pound and other Arts organisations; sharing and researching best-practice; keeping up to date with Arts Council proposals, and those of other leaders in the Arts.

### **Ongoing**

Actively seek funding streams, sponsorship from local individuals, organisations and businesses, to support the Town Council's own funding (currently £10k in 2020/21 budget).

### **Ongoing**

Actively welcome artists, creative practitioners and local residents to make suggestions about improvements to the artistic fabric of the town.

### **Ongoing**

Potential to work with Martingate on their proposals for Public Art, specifically murals, in the town.

In summary, the Town Council will consider every opportunity for Public Art to be incorporated in its work within the parish, in order to meet both the Town Council's strategic aims and the aspiration of the Creative Corsham Strategy:

**'To grow and celebrate cultural and creative activity in Corsham, so that by 2022 the town and local area is regionally recognised as a centre of excellence in the Arts and Creative Industries, and to develop our cultural assets to make a real difference to the economy of Corsham and the surrounding villages, to the lives of the people who live here and those who work and visit here.'**

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Alive with Centres of Excellence Aims and Objectives, Corsham Town Council Strategic Plan 2014-2018

Appendix 2: Priority Sites for Public Art Works for Consideration During 2020-2024.

*Sarah Leigh, Arts and Tourism Officer, June 2020*

*Strategy Approved: 17 June 2020*

*SL/ST/CS/PublicArtStrategy/11.6.20*