

## **PUBLIC ART AND HOUSING - EVENT SUMMARY**

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#### Overview

ixia's Public Art and Housing event took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2014 in Birmingham and explored the role of public art within the context of housing policies and developments.

Discussions during the course of the day included debates around the topdown versus the bottom-up delivery of public art projects; the post-war history of public art commissioning in Britain; whether we need more space to allow activity to happen rather than more art; funding for public art now and in the future; the roles of the citizen, the landowner and the developer; how our changing habits, work, spare time and where we spend it is impacting on the kinds of new places we are creating; and how our increased connectedness via social media has the potential to make it easier to access and discuss planning proposals and developments.

A variety of different artists' approaches were covered, from artist-led work engaging with the subject of development itself, to immersive performance-led work utilising new technology and social media. There was discussion around the ethics and responsibility of people working in this field to commission and deliver work sincerely with an open mind and where possible an open brief (something which the very term 'planning' seems to contradict). The growing role of the developer in building social housing was questioned, and over the course of the day the gap between the pace of development in London and everywhere else in the UK seemed to grow ever wider.

## **The Morning Session**

The moderator for the event, Sean Griffiths, Principal Architect at Sean Griffiths Modern Architect and Co-founder of Fashion Architecture Taste (See: <a href="http://www.fashionarchitecturetaste.com/">http://www.fashionarchitecturetaste.com/</a>), welcomed everyone and introduced the morning session's speakers. Sean suggested a number of questions for consideration during the event. These included: are placemaking, cultural wellbeing and good design meaningful terms, or part of an empty rhetoric?; and should the creative process be organic or top-down?

# Clare Devine, Director of Architecture and Built Environment, Cabe at the Design Council

See: http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-services/built-environment

Clare's presentation raised issues surrounding the impact on housing of:

- the ageing population;
- decreasing physical activity;
- the changing planning infrastructure (National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and Neighbourhood Plans).

Cabe value public art as an integral part of good design and sustainable development, but queried how it is possible to measure its impact, particularly on cultural wellbeing. Clare asserted that placemaking should look back as well as forward, reflecting on the historic context and social value to communities. Places that work well encourage investment, positive thinking and community confidence, improving quality of life and promoting neighbourhood identity. Public art can add social and environmental value, and as part of good design adds economic value. She used several case studies including Urban Splash's New Islington in Manchester to illustrate this.

Clare advocated for public art projects to be integral to developments from the outset, particularly because they can provide a way for communities to talk about what new developments might be like.

Clare argued that the impact of the NPPF will be governed by cultural strategies at Local Plan level, and that homebuilders and the sharing of best practice are both key.

## **Andrew Whitaker, Planning Director, Home Builders Federation (HBF)**

See: http://www.hbf.co.uk/

Andrew gave an insight into the pressures on housebuilders and how they think and talk. He detailed levels of 'private completions' and 'social completions' of developments - indicators for how the market is doing - and also 'starts' indicating the success of future housebuilding. Andrew suggested that 60,000 homes per quarter are needed, but that this has been affected by the recession. He asserted that the Help to Buy scheme has since increased

demand and created competitions. Planning permissions are increasing, but sales of new homes (which make up 8-10% of house sales each year) vary hugely across the UK.

Andrew distinguished between 'outlets' and 'multiple outlets' where a site is constructed by more than one developer. He suggested that multiple outlets are more competitive because buyers have a choice, enabling developers of multiple outlet sites to sell close to double the amount of houses on a single outlet site.

There has been concern that Help to Buy is fuelling a bubble in house prices, but Andrew suggested that steadier growth will come as more planning permissions are granted, and ongoing growth will only happen if more sites continue to be released. He claimed that housebuilding within the planning system has been 'rationed' until now, but that the NPPF focuses on positive planning, economic growth and housing delivery. It allows the government to force local authorities to release land to developers if they aren't meeting need.

Andrew suggested that public art is one of the ways developers can differentiate themselves from the rest within a competitive system, which he called 'beauty parade planning'. He also pointed out that good design should be integrated. For projects to be viable 'planning requires a willing landowner and a willing developer' (Andrew didn't mention communities) and indicated what influences this willingness through a graphic showing Gross Development Values (GDV), or what a house can be sold for.

#### GDV is made up of:

- build costs;
- profit;
- costs of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 Planning Obligations (S106);
- land value.

Public art can be part of build costs, CIL or S106. If build costs, CIL or S106 increase, this will reduce the land value meaning a landowner is less willing to sell a site. If GDV is reduced by, for example, investment in public art, this will reduce a housebuilder's profit and they may, therefore, be less willing to invest in it. (It could of course be argued conversely that investment in public art, by improving an area increases house values, but this is hard to prove.)

Local authority priorities then come into play:

- affordable housing (non-negotiable);
- carbon challenge (non-negotiable);
- infrastructure;
- design;
- · public sector services.

The impact falls on design (and by extension the commissioning of public art) when costs are being minimised as this is a negotiable cost.

Andrew used the analogy of the Ferrari 458 - supposedly the best car ever made and costing £206,000. Buying one (and by extension, commissioning artists within developments) may not be at the top of housebuilders' priorities.

## Mark Davy, Founder, Futurecity

See: http://futurecity.co.uk/home/

Mark spoke about his experience of working as an art consultant with housebuilders over the last 7 years in London, Cambridge and Kent. He suggested that there is a lack of recognition of professionalism within public art - developers hope not to have to appoint another paid specialist for art commissioning. Futurecity have consequentially become more like an architectural practice and speak the language of developers. They have a team of 18 working on 180 projects across the UK. These include a placemaking strategy for Greenwich Peninsula, projects in Nine Elms (including Battersea Power Station), White City and Cambridge.

Mark maintained that Futurecity projects are primarily developer-funded rather than via S106, and funding is usually not from a dedicated art budget, but through the clever use of existing budgets (such as marketing, seating and signage). For example, the major new work by Richard Wilson at Heathrow's Terminal 2, 'Slipstream', was funded through the development's landscape and cladding budgets. Futurecity's approach also promotes that developers invest in artists (e.g. Chelsea Futurespace), embed artists in landscape teams and encourage the use of otherwise empty spaces for creative means.

Mark argued that the arts have been in the ownership of the public sector for too long. Creative opportunities within developments often get missed because they are seen too late, are acted upon too slowly, and developers don't understand the language of the arts.

In Mark's view the use of S106 to secure public art projects is failing because it forces developers to provide public art. When developers are made aware of the wider possibilities of art commissioning within their developments, then they want to do it.

Futurecity aims to maximise opportunities and help developers make their developments distinctive. Mark argued that art should be embedded within developments and that we must find a way to make its provision a natural part of the development process.

## Ju Row Farr, Artist, Blast Theory

See: http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/

Ju's presentation focused on the use of interactive and digital media within public art projects; an approach which could inform the development and implementation of projects within the context of housing developments.

Blast Theory have been making work together for 23 years, since 1997 collaborating with the Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham, a group of 40 computer scientists, ethnographers and interface designers. Blast Theory make site-specific games, films and performances often using mobile phones and new technology such as live streaming and GPS; their work is social, interactive and collaborative and 'the user completes the work'. Participants in their site-specific projects include visitors, inhabitants, remote participants, young people, the artists and bystanders.

Ju showed a short film of a project with the Royal Exchange Theatre called 'The Truth About You' to illustrate Blast Theory's work, showing 16-18 year olds from Manchester speaking to camera, operating their own equipment and using social media.

To Blast Theory art is not a one-way process, the artists are not experts, and are also part of the audience. Blast Theory do 'pseudo-architectural investigations'. Their events often take place at night-time, online and involve role-play, whereby people are given a mission or a task to fulfill.

Blast Theory is interested in porous boundaries - private/public, fiction/documentary and maker/audience - particularly as these boundaries are becoming blurred through the use of new media to open up 'new places where we can make work'.

Ju's view is that 'public art is about groups of people wanting to come together to do something, even if it is for a short amount of time'.

#### Q&A: Clare Devine; Andrew Whitaker; Mark Davy; and Ju Row Farr.

The key points raised included:

- Places and how they are used evolve over time and it is difficult for housebuilders to plan for change;
- Social media has had a big influence on the way that people engage with developments, but whether views expressed via social media are genuinely reflected in the planning decisions made is questionable;
- Permanent public art should have a clear life expectancy and a plan for maintenance and decommissioning;

- Developers need to trust artists to deliver something that supports what they want in the long term;
- Lack of communication between local authority departments can lead to opportunities for public art projects being missed;
- Social change should be acknowledged by developers and artists.

#### The Afternoon Session

# Louise Wyman, Midlands Large Sites Lead, Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)

See: http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/

The HCA is the government's national regeneration agency. It is a major landowner (11,000 hectares including mining sites and Regional Development Agency assets) that invests in projects such as large-scale housebuilding and affordable homes.

Louise suggested there are creative opportunities through the future development of new garden cities (32,000 homes), the HCA's Large Sites programme, and community-led development.

She gave an overview of the history of public art commissioning in the UK (with roots in the 1946 New Towns Act and the subsequent creation of 26 new towns including Harlow, Skelmersdale, Milton Keynes, Corby, Redditch), and the history of the HCA.

The HCA work closely with housebuilders such as Crest Nicholson who 'recognise that it pays for them to invest in design'.

The HCA is currently tendering for £1bn of locally-led large housing schemes (1500+ houses) through their Large Sites Infrastructure Programme, aimed at accelerating new housebuilding. The first drawdown will be in 2016.

#### Other smaller funds include:

- A Local Growth Fund for developments of 250 to 1500 housing units (must be supported by Local Enterprise Partnership);
- £525m Builders Finance Fund for developments of 15 to 250 houses.

Summing up, Louise commented that technology has enabled more people to do things (such as working and shopping) remotely and that we are therefore using cities in new ways, with retail areas in urban centres becoming showrooms, while cities remain spaces for socialising and eating.

Louise was supportive of the potential of art integrated into developments, but argued that the future is using budgets differently - the approach that Mark

Davy from Futurecity described. Louise doesn't accept the suggested tension that housebuilders and artists are in opposition.

## Jeanne van Heeswijk, Artist

See: http://www.jeanneworks.net/

Jeanne talked about her projects 'The Blue House' and '2Up 2Down/Homebaked'. She argued that 'shifting geopolitical boundaries have generated local areas of conflict', that 'people are becoming disinvested from their own environments' and for the importance of 'making space for people' in this new era of development.

## The Blue House, Ijburg, Amsterdam

See: <a href="http://www.jeanneworks.net/projects/the\_blue\_house/">http://www.jeanneworks.net/projects/the\_blue\_house/</a>

40,000 houses were planned on reclaimed land and due for completion by 2015. Jeanne was not commissioned but in 18 months raised the funds to buy a house within the development. She was shocked at how pre-scripted the development was, with no shops planned until 5,000 people had moved in. The Blue House was created as a space for 'the yet to come, for the still don't know' that assisted forms of self-organisation among the new community. The project created a common vegetable garden, opened a neighbourhood restaurant, had a flower stall and created a periscope to give a family back a view lost when new buildings were constructed.

The project explored unanticipated conflicts that grew up in the area, for example with illegal domestic workers and mixed communities moving in. Only 20% social housing was delivered (originally 40% was planned). 'Almost all of the predictions upon which liburg island was designed were challenged'. Jeanne wanted to show how to fight for spaces to allow community relationships to flourish and argues for 'inclusive organic urban planning'.

## 2Up 2Down/Homebaked, Anfield, Liverpool

See: http://www.jeanneworks.net/#/projects/2up2down\_\_\_homebaked/

The project responded to the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) scheme to replace terraces of houses with new homes as a solution to market failure. In 10 years 1,500 houses were demolished leaving empty plots, with many more houses left empty. Only 78 new houses were built. Residents were pushed into debt, renting or moving. Businesses closed but some residents remained. Jeanne argued that 'housing is the battlefield of our time'. '2Up 2Down/Homebaked' redeveloped the local Mitchell bakery (which had closed) as a co-op with a training kitchen. During Liverpool Biennial visitors were invited to Anfield to hear residents talking about the impact of Housing Market Renewal on their lives. The group has created a community land trust to develop the site immediately behind the bakery.

Jeanne challenged Andrew Whitaker's analogy of the Ferrari, pointing out that there is a different way to create profit, 'there are different cars that also drive'.

## Paul Kelly, Senior Arts Development Manager, Lancashire County Council

See:

http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/atoz/a\_to\_z/service.asp?u\_id=1308&tab=1

In contrast to some of the morning's speakers, Paul gave a northern perspective, arguing for the importance of cultural democracy and artists being offered the opportunity to 'play' in the public realm and suggesting there is a cultural under-investment in many areas of northern England.

#### Up in the Air, Liverpool

See: <a href="http://www.nevillegabie.com/works/up-in-the-air-5/">http://www.nevillegabie.com/works/up-in-the-air-5/</a>

'Up in the Air' was part of a 5-year project with Liverpool Housing Action Trust focused on demolishing and refurbishing public sector housing estates in the city. Artists Neville Gabie and Leo Fitzmaurice, invited 30 artists (including George Shaw, Marcus Coates and Will Self) to undertake a month's paid residency in a tower block. Some engaged with residents, others didn't. One proposal was to fill a tower block with wildflower seeds that would be scattered when the block was demolished. The project retained a sensitivity about the area changing, although proposals for public art were not taken on by the successor housing association.

## Art for Places, Housing Market Renewal programme, Bootle

See: http://raumlabor.net/the-promised-land/

'Art for Places' included temporary commissions by Raumlabor and public works and led to 'Empty Spaces', exploring the creative re-use of empty buildings and derelict sites. The project resulted in the production of Bootle jam and honey, and creative projects on the canal culminating in a festival including swan pedalos, canoeing and the building of a floating taxi and a boat made from a reclaimed skip.

#### The Big Art Project, Sutton Manor Colliery, St Helens

See: http://www.dreamsthelens.com/

The Big Art Project culminated in the monumental sculpture 'Dream' by Jaume Plensa on the site of the old colliery that had closed fifteen years before. It was the final outcome of years of arts commissioning in the area by Paul Kelly and Helena Housing with projects such as 'Heaven' by Leo Fitzmaurice, a mobile artwork that asked people 'Where is heaven to you?' and a billboard project to create a new motto for St Helens.

## In-Situ, Byfield, Pendle, Lancashire

See: <a href="http://insitu-uk.blogspot.co.uk/">http://insitu-uk.blogspot.co.uk/</a>

Paul is currently working with artists William Titley, Kerry Morrison and Paul Hartley on a project connecting with the community at the local library. The artists are about to develop a range of proposals for a large mill space in Byfield.

Paul argued for a commitment to connect 'people, place and great art' and a commitment to delivery over the long-term.

# Q&A: Louise Wyman; Jeanne van Heeswijk; Paul Kelly; and all of the speakers.

The key points raised included:

- There was a general consensus that bottom-up public art projects work best, although funding agencies struggle to support work produced in this way;
- It was suggested that we need to find new ways of working together, and that the role of the citizen and the community should be considered alongside the developer and landowner;
- Some were critical of the urban focus of the day and suggested lessons could be learned from the parish planning process;
- It was suggested that if local authorities (rather than developers) were building more social housing, it could help resolve some of the problems raised today around public art being edged out so that developers are still able to make a profit;
- Assumptions are often made (wrongly) by developers, artists and architects about residents - research and understanding an area is key.

#### About ixia public art think tank

ixia promotes and influences the development and implementation of public art policies, strategies and projects by creating and distributing knowledge to arts and non-arts policy makers and delivery organisations within the public and private sectors, curators, artists and the public.

See: <a href="http://ixia-info.com/">http://ixia-info.com/</a> and <a href="http://www.publicartonline.org.uk/">http://ixia-info.com/</a> and <a href="http://www.publicartonline.org.uk/">http://www.publicartonline.org.uk/</a>