



Symposium on visual arts development 22-9-2016.

Analysis of key themes and suggested actions from the symposium event.

The Chester Visual Arts Development Symposium on September 22nd as expected identified challenges in the development of improved visual arts provision and a wide range of ideas and offers of specific expertise and support to meet these challenges. There was positive support for Chester's ability to establish and sustain a successful visual arts programme with 57 comments on this. 52 gaps in the current provision were identified, 18 actions were offered to address these perceived gaps and there were 17 offers of specific help to engage with addressing the challenge. Whilst the gaps in provision were well understood and have been rehearsed in various surveys and meetings in the past the essential thrust of the symposium was to identify viable actions to create a more dynamic and vibrant visual arts culture in the city. Outside of specific infrastructural issues around access, car parking and the availability and quality of city spaces, four key but interrelated actions emerge from an analysis of the responses. These actions fit under the following headings, Vision, Programme, Space, participants.

Vision / Visionary

Under vision there was a strong sense that the agenda for visual arts within the city could be moved forward effectively with the appointment of an established curator with vision, cultural network connections and experience in delivering a high quality programme of visual arts interventions / events, with national and international reach.

Programme

There was support for the idea that a regular structured programme of visual arts events and interventions needs to be put in place to build a unique visual arts' identity in the city, create momentum and establish reputation. The programme concept creates the opportunity for inclusiveness, leverages available resource and expertise.

Space

Whilst there was a clear ambition to achieve an identifiable public contemporary visual art exhibition space for the City, there is a recognition that this would require considerable finance and achieving the required investment would need a sustainable plan. The current gap, both in secure exhibition venues and creative development space for artists was highlighted, particularly in relation to emerging artists and graduates from the university arts programmes. As a result, there was action required to identify opportunities to exploit underused space within the city, as both venue and workspace, to explore the potential for creating new space and also to take art out of the gallery and into the city as a concept.

Participants

Some comments identified the lack of understanding of the potential visual arts audience and it is tempting to be overly tourist focused in regard to this audience. The commentary highlights the need for a more participant concept where visual arts practitioners, property owners, city politicians, business owners and citizens motivated to engage with the project, can be involved in meeting elements of the challenge. It seems important here that the participants are more than just the audience.

Chester Visual Arts Membership: Ian Short - AielloShort, Cynthia Aiello-Short - AielloShort, Hilary Banner - Art Fund Cheshire, Rupert Collis - Grosvenor Estate, Professor Neil Grant - University of Chester, Rev Canon Peter Howell-Jones - Chester Cathedral, Geoffrey Piper - NW Business Leadership Team.

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What will CVA do now?

Having identified these four key actions, CVA will become a formal company entity and set about finding the means to address the actions outlined. Those who have offered direct help and expertise will be approached to develop the participation. Key first steps will be to establish an executive infrastructure, identify capital and revenue streams and address the idea of the curator, the establishment of a programme and its delivery team.

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