

Participatory Evaluation of the Inspire Public Art Project

Four Case Studies:

**Newbiggin Sailing Club, Second Avenue Home Zone,
Wildspace Network, Young People's Perception of the
Project**

Prepared by:

Barefoot Research and Evaluation
barefoot@dsl.pipex.com

September 2005

Table of Contents

	Page Number
Summary	2
Introduction	4
Case Studies	
Newbiggin Sailing Club	7
Second Avenue Home Zone	15
Wildspace Network	26
Research With Young People	37
Conclusion	45
Appendix 1: Methodology	48
Appendix 2: People and Organisations Interviewed	50
Appendix 3: Timeline for the Consultation for the Second Avenue Home Zone	51

List of Abbreviations

Acronym	Description
BVBC	Blyth Valley Borough Council
CAA	Cramlington Area Assembly
CAP	Community Area Partnership
CVS	Council for Voluntary Services
EADT	East Ashington Development Trust
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NCC	Northumberland County Council
NOF	New Opportunities Fund
SVA	Seaton Valley Assembly
WDC	Wansbeck District Council
WI	Wansbeck Initiative

Summary

This evaluation was commissioned to contribute to the assessment of several of Inspire's objectives.

The first of these was **Objective 2: Increase the attractiveness of the environment to: local communities; stakeholder organisations; visitors; and businesses**. The indicators or evidence for judging whether this objective has been achieved was the level of support for public art within local communities and stakeholder organisations. Based on the research evidence, we can conclude that there has been support from local communities and stakeholder organisations and the programme has increased the attractiveness of the environment to local communities, stakeholder organisations and visitors (no businesses were consulted). The research indicates that the programme has made every effort to consult with, and include stakeholders, within its remit for the development of public art. This has led to satisfactory outcomes. It can be concluded that the consultation process, i.e. allowing stakeholders to input their opinions, hold discussions and meet artists, is key to local ownership of public art.

The second of these objectives was **Objective 3: Contribute to the modernisation of the environment and increase its distinctiveness**. The indicators or evidence for judging whether this objective has been achieved was the perceptions of the local environment by young adults (16 – 24) living in the area. The research with young people demonstrated that the type of art developed by the Inspire art programme would unequivocally lead to the modernisation of the local environment and increase its distinctiveness. The young people were very enthusiastic about the Inspire art and expressed considerable support for the modernity of the art. However, the young people recognised the importance of remembering local history and heritage, although in their words, "*not to live it*". Young people and others consulted during the research felt that public art gave an area a sense of identity and encouraged other people to visit and had an influence on whether residents chose to leave an area.

The third of these objectives was **Objective 4: Ensure that communities and stakeholders are properly engaged in public art and design development**. The indicators or evidence for judging whether this objective has been achieved was the approach to engagement employed by Inspire Officer and the capability and confidence of community participants involved in the public art and design development projects. Similar to the judgement on Objective 2, the research evidence shows that, in the three case studies, the Inspire Officer has made every effort to involve stakeholders in the development of the Inspire public art, often going beyond expected efforts. The research indicates that communities and stakeholders have been properly engaged in the public art and design development in the three case studies. The research also demonstrates that the attention to the consultation process is key to the capability and confidence of community participants involved in public art development.

In addition to making a judgement on whether the programme has achieved objectives 2, 3 and 4, this evaluation can make further contributions to the overall programme evaluation.

The evaluation found that it is difficult to involve a representative group of community members in public art projects. This is due to the absence of mechanisms that allow for access to a representative group. Accessible mechanisms, such as community fora are predominantly made up of older people, with often more males than females. Indeed, when the Inspire programme attempted to hold public meetings in accessible areas, there was a very low participation rate. It should be noted that this is the case (in these case studies in South East Northumberland) with the more 'public' projects, and not with projects that affect a specific target group, such as the Newbiggin Sailing Club, which have a committed and enthusiastic user group. In the light of these difficulties, the Inspire programme made significant efforts to identify and consult with as many identified groups as possible, within time and resource restrictions.

It was the intention of the evaluation to attempt to identify if there is any link between feelings of public ownership of public art and the level of stakeholder involvement. Based on the evidence gathered during this part of the evaluation, it can be said that the most important factor in public ownership is process. If stakeholders feel that they have been given sufficient opportunity to air their views, even/particularly their negative views, discuss proposals and discuss art, then (in the case studies) they feel a level of ownership and satisfaction.

Another intention of the evaluation was to attempt to determine if there have been any changes in people's sense of place in the case study examples, i.e. do people feel better about living in their local environment and their place within it, as a result of being involved in the public art projects. Again the evidence points towards a positive outcome, i.e. they do feel better because of the art and having been involved, even in a consultative manner. Many stakeholders felt that art was lower down the list of socio-economic and environmental improvements, yet its presence gave added value to those improvements. This notion of added value was a theme that ran through two of the case studies. Stakeholders were surprised about the positive impact of the art in the context of an existing development and how it beautified an area and produced discussion.

Introduction

This evaluation report represents an examination of how the Inspire Public Arts Programme in South East Northumberland engaged with stakeholders who were involved, to varying degrees, in the art development. It does this by examining three case studies: Newbiggin Sailing Club; the Second Avenue Home Zone; and the Wildspace Network. In addition to these case studies, research was carried out with young people to gauge the impact of public art on their lives. These are presented as four distinct studies in this report.

Appendix 1 outlines the methodology used in this study and appendix 2 presents those individuals and organisations interviewed for the research.

This evaluation is part of a broader evaluation of the Inspire Programme carried out by PLB Consulting.

The objective of this part of the evaluation is to take a more participatory approach to the research and evaluation and to explore with those who have been involved in the art development process what their major issues and concerns have been, and what impact the art has had on them.

The rationale for this aspect of the evaluation comes from a series of factors. Firstly, as the Inspire Programme is a public arts programme, it was deemed important to look at how the public have been involved and what impact the art has had on the public. Secondly, as the Inspire Programme is part of a broader regeneration process, it was considered important to look, using a participatory approach and taking a worm's eye perspective the role of art in that regeneration. Thirdly, and more qualitatively, it was considered important to examine what impact the art has had on people's sense of place and how the art has impacted on how people feel about living in South East Northumberland. This latter point is placed in the context of a region that has, in many senses, been economically and socially depressed since the decline of heavy industry and the fishing industry and pit closures.

This study is not an exhaustive evaluation and there are obvious constraints, such as using only three case studies out of numerous Inspire projects. However, the results and conclusions of this study are considered by the researcher to be indicative of wider trends and broader processes. Therefore, they can be used to make useful conclusions in relation to public art, community engagement and regeneration.

Preamble to the Study

Firstly, it is important to note that a major objective of the Inspire Programme was to engage with and have a positive impact upon communities within South East Northumberland.

In relation to this objective, it is important to comment on the complexity of issues surrounding public involvement in public art.

Inspire only commission professional artists. The reason for doing this is to ensure product quality. They do not commission amateur artists or work directly with community members to produce artwork. However, the professional artists that they do commission may work with children or communities in producing the commissioned piece (for example, Andrew Small's street carpet and seats in the Second Avenue Home Zone).

Justification of the above point is that Inspire and the Public Art and Design Officer are tasked with creating a step-change in the built environment; not incremental change ("*... not changing flagstones, but replacing the whole street¹*"). Therefore, the work that is produced as a result of Inspire must be highly professional, have high impact and lead to change (in community attitudes, investment patterns and in aesthetics).

Art that is produced by the community is often of too poor quality to be used in these kind of public art developments. This is generally due to those producing the work having no formal training, which results in poor output, for example in relation to composition or tonal range. The poor output will not satisfy either the commissioning body or the community where the art is to be installed, especially as the local communities are often reported to specify that they '*want the best*'.

This is not to say that artwork produced by the community cannot be used within wider schemes. For example, in the Second Avenue Home Zone, the artist carried out a one day workshop at a local school where many designs were produced by the children. The artist then chose the best designs and translated them into a professional product, which was part of his bigger scheme.

The programme also believes that there are better ways of involving the community in art than by making them create the art themselves. For example, an Inspire project that created a series of banners to be displayed on lamp posts and gable ends in Station Road around Ashington commissioned a professional photographer. The photographer spent considerable time carrying out research with local traders to identify compositional elements and items of local note. In the production of the photographs for the banners, the street traders and shop staff learnt about photography and how the final product was created. There was also the development of local ownership of the finished product, as local people had been involved in the process and the photographs contained images of the goods they traded.

Furthermore, the programme does not think that art produced by the community is necessarily representative of the wider community.

There are also complexities in relation to who judges that a piece of art is a good piece of art. Although no formal audit or judgement is carried out, the quality of art is judged by the Northumberland Public Art Panel and the Public Art and Design Officer, using his own professional opinion. However, in the case of the latter, the professional judgement of quality is also not a straightforward issue. For example, the Newbiggin Sailing Club paintings are a very good product in relation to the good use of space, including presentation space and influence on public space, and the impact they have on the local community. However, from a purist perspective, the paintings are derivative (i.e. in artist's style from 1915) and although of high quality, they add little to the art world.

These issues create a tension that is implicit in the Inspire programme and more specifically in the role of the Public Art and Design Officer:

“The regeneration people want big flagship projects, the community want the art to be reflective of local history and be involved and the art world wants something meaningful²”.

Newbiggin Sailing Club

Background

Newbiggin Sailing Club is a private members club and is located in the centre of Newbiggin. It has been in existence since 1962.

The Club has experienced significant change in the last twenty years, with most change occurring over the last five years. In the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the membership of the Club was very exclusive and consisted of a wealthy clientele and was very much seen as apart from the community of Newbiggin. Over the last six years, the Club has become a cornerstone of the Newbiggin regeneration process, has an inclusive membership made up of young and old from all socio-economic groups and is very much part of the local community. The recent developments have not been straightforward and much effort and dedication has been invested by non-paid members of the Club to achieve this transformation.

In 1999, a process was initiated to rebuild and renovate the Sailing Club and a series of funding bids were submitted to local, regional and national funders. Central to these funding proposals were actions to attract young people to the club. This would serve the purpose of embedding the Club within the community and ensuring future membership and thus its sustainability. The funding would pay for major physical reconstruction of the Club, materials and equipment, and for a support worker to work with the young people.

Funding was sourced from a total of 18 different funders, ranging in value from £500 to £300,000, with the two main funders being the Coalfield Regeneration Trust and Sport England. Securing the funding was also not straightforward and there were a series of applications, resubmissions, appeals, negotiations and discussions, particularly with the two main funders.

The completion date for the work was initially April 2004. However, due to problems with the main building contractor, the work was not completed until 2005.

During the whole of 2004, there were no facilities at the Club as a result of the renovation work. A series of temporary measures were set up by the Club in place of permanent facilities, such as temporary toilets, tents as changing rooms and local members provided some hot shower facilities. However, as a result of the disturbances this caused, active membership dwindled from 100 to approximately 35.

It is against this backdrop of change and disturbance that the public art development took place.

Public Art Development at the Newbiggin Sailing Club

In November 2003, Commodore Dave Futers who is the Chair of the Newbiggin Sailing Club contacted the Public Art and Design Officer to discuss a possible art project on the Sailing Club's external wall.

As a result of the renovations taking place at the Sailing Club, there was a large blank wall which faces the street. The wall faced a main thoroughfare and public gathering space including a sheltered band stand and pedestrian area. The space therefore had significant potential for beautifying and adding value to this part of Newbiggin.

Figure 1. Newbiggin Sailing Club Wall Showing Public Space Before the Development



The Commodore, who is also an active community member, became aware of Inspire and the Public Art and Design Officer through his attendance at the Newbiggin Community Area Partnership (CAP) and the Wansbeck Initiative's Housing and Physical Environment theme group (see box 1).

Box 1. The Wansbeck Initiative

The Wansbeck Initiative is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for the administrative area of Wansbeck. The objective of the Wansbeck Initiative is to narrow social and economic inequalities in Wansbeck and, with support from Central Government, act as a regeneration catalyst. It explicitly works with the community and voluntary sector, through the Wansbeck Voluntary and Community Sector Network.

The Wansbeck Initiative is made up of: residents; businesses; housing services; health services; the Police; voluntary and community groups; schools; the Local Authority; and skills and learning providers.

It has eight themed groups made up of representatives from those agencies listed above, which meet approximately every eight weeks. The groups are: Quality of Life; Crime and Disorder; Learning; Employment (Worklessness); Young People; Enterprise; Creativity; and Housing and Physical Environment.

In addition to the theme groups, the Wansbeck Initiative also created Community Area Partnerships (CAP), which are constituted on a geographical basis. There are six CAPS; Newbiggin, East Ashington, West Ashington, East Bedlington, West Bedlington and North Bedlington. They are intended to provide an opportunity for local communities to input into the decision making process and feed into the Wansbeck Initiative. They are attended by organisations representing the community, community representatives, voluntary groups, local businesses, service providers and councillors. The CAPs are generally attended by older people and typically number around 30 attendees. They also meet once every eight weeks.

The Commodore explained to the Public Art and Design Officer that the Club was undergoing renovation and an extension was being built. There would be a blank white wall which was adjacent to a well used public space and did the Public Art and Design Officer want to use it *“for a kids’ mural or something?”*.

At the end of November, the Public Art and Design Officer and the Commodore met to discuss options. The Public Art and Design Officer firstly explained that murals were not generally supported by Inspire for several reasons:

- Firstly, murals and direct painting onto walls are difficult to maintain, either being difficult to protect from graffiti or because the paint blisters. It is also expensive to re-commission the artist to correct damage.
- Secondly, they do not commission work by children (see section on preamble to the study).
- Thirdly, securing funding for murals is difficult, as art funding is commonly based on professional products and artists.

There were three possible options for public art on the wall space of the Club; painting, photography or relief carving. Photography was rejected because it was, in this case, considered to be of limited value as photography was

commonplace and there were insufficient funds for relief carving. Painting was proposed as the viable option as there was an explicit skill factor in painting which appeals to people and the original paintings could be sold by Inspire to contribute to overall project costs.

The Public Art and Design Officer developed a proposal to find one artist and commission three 90cm x 90cm paintings to be installed on the walls.

As the Commodore was involved with negotiations with both funders and builders and was attempting to retain membership of the Club, public art development was low down on his list of concerns:

“Putting up three pictures was the least of my worries”.

The funding for the project was to be met by Inspire, £1500 from Newbiggin Life, with a £1080 contribution from the Newbiggin Sailing Club. The total cost of the project was approximately £4000. This funding arrangement fits into Inspire’s overall funding policy of attempting, wherever possible, to match or lever in funds from elsewhere.

The Public Art and Design Officer then carried out research on suitable painters with a range of styles and identified 12. He contacted each individually to determine their interest and a total of seven painters put themselves forward.

In April 2005, the Public Art and Design Officer gave presentations about the seven artists to the Sailing Club members. The meeting was attended by 20 people, both young and old, and lasted for several hours (see figure 2). The Public Art and Design Officer introduced the presentations by explaining to the members what they ought to be considering in their choice of art, e.g. how well the paintings can be seen at a distance and how they will define the public space. During the meeting, comments were asked for from the members about the art rather than a yes or no. In this way a critical discussion developed about the issues surrounding the art. The Commodore stated:

“It was a good job there was a bar at the leisure centre, ‘cos the discussions went over and over and things got heated at times”.

At the end of the session, the members had short listed three artists, which was reduced to two and finally a vote was held and one artist was chosen with two thirds of the members in favour.

The Commodore was very surprised at the turnout of the consultation event, as this was the time when active membership was at its lowest.

Figure 2. Club Members Choosing the Artists



Photograph by Malcolm Muir, 2004 (permission granted by the Sailing Club).

After choosing the artist, there was a discussion about the topics of the paintings, e.g. *'we want one painting of [this view] and one of the [that view]'*. Facilitated by the Public Art and Design Officer, the members then developed 12 topics to consider. These 12 topics were written into the artist's contract for consideration.

In May 2004, the chosen artist came to Newbiggin for a few days, met with the Sailing Club members and familiarised herself with the area and began sketching. The Public Art and Design Officer felt that meeting the artist was very important to allow the beneficiaries to engage with the person and create a social contract.

The artist produced six canvasses as a result of her stay in Newbiggin. In October 2004, the canvasses were shown to the Sailing Club members and a resultant discussion took place about the paintings and how the eventual three must 'fit together'. The Public Art and Design Officer facilitated this discussion, guiding the conversation, making it clear that the exercise was not about choosing a 'favourite painting'. Three canvasses were chosen by the members of the Club. These three were 'views' of the town and environs and were chosen with the objective of trying to please people from all communities⁵: one view of the southerly end of the bay, one view of the town from the sea and one view of the north westerly end of the bay. It is the Public Art and Design Officer's view that they did not choose all of the three 'best', nor the three that worked best together, but they chose the ones which were the most inclusive.

"It's a very fractured community ... so we didn't want all mining pictures⁶".

In April 2005, the paintings were installed and they remain undamaged at the time of writing.

It is worthy of note that after a local press release about the visiting artist, the Public Art and Design Officer received a phone call from a local amateur artist raising a complaint. The complainant asked why a local artist had not been chosen and why the request for artists was not locally advertised. The Public Art and Design Officer responded that the database of artists had been advertised in the Artist Newsletter⁷ and that he did not advertise individual commissions due to the cost, timescales and administrative implications. The complainant was invited to make a submission to the database.

Discussion

In the view of the Sailing Club, the installation of the paintings was a very small, and at times thought to be an insignificant part to the overall development of the Club.

“Three paintings were not a big concern ...⁹”.

It should be noted that the development was not just physical but also cultural, with the Club moving from being elitist and “*full of old sailors*¹⁰” to a modern, gender balanced, young persons’ inclusive club that was part of the local community.

The Club gave credit to the Public Art and Design Officer, as it was thought that he realised that the art was a small part of the development and never gave the impression that the art had inflated importance.

The Club’s renovation and transformation into a community resource was one of the first and most important regeneration initiatives in the town¹¹. The Club’s position as a community resource is reinforced in other ways. For example, the Club stores the chairs that are used for concerts in the adjacent bandstand. *“I tell you one thing that the concerts’ll be better this year ‘cos they’ll not be staring at that toilet¹²”.*

Figure 3. The Sailing Club With the Installed Public Art



The public art has had more of an impact that was initially expected in relation to the reaction of the local community and by the Club's members. The Club believes that the art has led to an improved environment and has been the topic of many conversations.

"It surprised me the number of people that when they [the paintings] went up said, 'eee that's smashin' where d'ya get them from'¹³"

Members of the public were also very positive about the public art and the role it plays in adding to the transformation of the public space and generally *"brightening the place up"*. Other comments from the public of Newbiggin include:

"It's quite relaxin' seein' that".

“Hasn’t it tidied the area up”.

“I’ve never heard a derogatory comment”.

“I expected them to be covered in spray paint, but they haven’t been touched”.

“Everyone who’s seen them has said they’re wonderful”.

The attitude of the Commodore has changed towards public art, *“I’m looking at it [public art] now whereas I wouldn’t have before, I would’ve called them [artists] idiots before but not now”.*

On a more pragmatic level, with a concentration on the regeneration of Newbiggin, since the redevelopment of the Club, there has seen an increase of 30% in Club membership.

Conclusion

The transformation of the Club into a community resource has been a testimony of the hard work and effort of several local residents. The public art, although initially considered to be a small and perhaps insignificant aspect of the whole, is now considered by the Club and local residents to be symbolic of the entire process.

The art represents added value to the Club’s development and consequently to the regeneration process. The art has contributed to the improvement of an important pedestrianised public space, which contains public areas for concerts, a well used thoroughfare and a café, the windows of which look onto the area. The art has become a talking point, inviting comment and debate amongst local residents.

It must be stated that without the Inspire Programme, the art would not exist.

Second Avenue Home Zone

Background

The Second Avenue Home Zone, an area which encompasses 1200 households, is part of the bigger Hirst Community Home Zone in Ashington. The project is funded by Northumberland County Council's (NCC) Local Transport Plan.

The project developed from concerns of local residents of the Hirst Community about the need to improve the built environment and decrease the speed of cars in their area. These concerns were voiced to both councillors and to council officers.

A steering group was created in 2003 and consisted of NCC officers, the Community Empowerment Team (CET),¹⁴ WDC Officers, East Ashington Development Trust (EADT), Northumbria Police, Sure Start and the Groundwork Trust. In mid 2004, residents expressed an interest and began to attend these meetings. This group met monthly or more frequently in accordance with need.

A Residents' Committee was set up in the summer of 2003, initially with eight members, who also met monthly to raise community concerns and issues. Although membership was small, there was significant community interest, and there were many residents who attended consultation events. The Residents' Committee continue to meet every month to discuss maintenance and other issues, although membership has dropped.

Wansbeck CVS and the East Ashington Development Trust have been instrumental in the development of the Second Avenue Home Zone and the public art within it. The CVS and the EADT have worked together to mobilise the community and provide a conduit for the issues and concerns held by the community. The offices of the EADT are located on Second Avenue and have provided an opportunity for residents to voice their concerns or raise issues at anytime during office hours.

The Project Development Officer for the EADT felt that whilst many residents did not want to have formal responsibilities such as those associated with committee membership, they did want to voice their opinions and provide an input, "*residents pop into the office all the time ... this is where we got most feedback*".

Box 2. Home Zones

A Home Zone is a street or group of streets designed primarily to meet the interests of pedestrians and cyclists rather than motorists, opening up the street for social use. Legally, neither pedestrians nor vehicles have priority, but the road may be reconfigured to make it more favourable to pedestrians. For example, traffic calming features and benches or play areas may be introduced.

Home Zones create attractive urban environments. They have the potential to be better for the environment as they are likely to encourage more local trips on foot or by bicycle, in turn cutting levels of noise and air pollution. Home Zones are streets where people can enjoy taking time to stop and chat with neighbours.

Local authorities are piloting nine Home Zones in England and Wales supported by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

As well as 'official' pilots, a growing number of Home Zones are being set up independently by local authorities, developers, and housing associations across the UK. Although there is no ring-fenced funding for Home Zones, local authorities are encouraged to include schemes in their Local Transport Plans, just as the NCC have done with the Hirst Community Home Zone.

Home Zones can be 'retrofit' - existing streets which are redesigned, as with the Hirst Community Home Zone; or 'new-build' - new housing developments.

National campaigning organisations assert that Home Zones can provide a better quality of life. A Home Zone can turn streets into valued public spaces, which are safer for everyone. They believe that Home Zones can provide a safer place for children to play near their homes, and are safer places for older people and disabled people to walk in the street.

It is likely that Home Zones, as in other European countries, will create stronger communities. Getting more people out in the street could also lead to a reduction in street crime and the fear of crime.

Source: adapted from www.HomeZoneneeds.org.uk

The Development of the Home Zone

The Second Avenue Home Zone project consisted of three phases.

Phase One

This stage of the project lasted for approximately 12 months, starting in November 2002. Phase one consisted of work carried out by the Highways Department of the NCC signposting two entry points into the Zone and replacing zebra with puffin crossings.

The consultation for this phase consisted of the standard Highways format, i.e. letter drops through residents' doors. There was a very good response to this consultation in favour of the measures.

Figure 4. Layout of the Hirst Community Home Zone

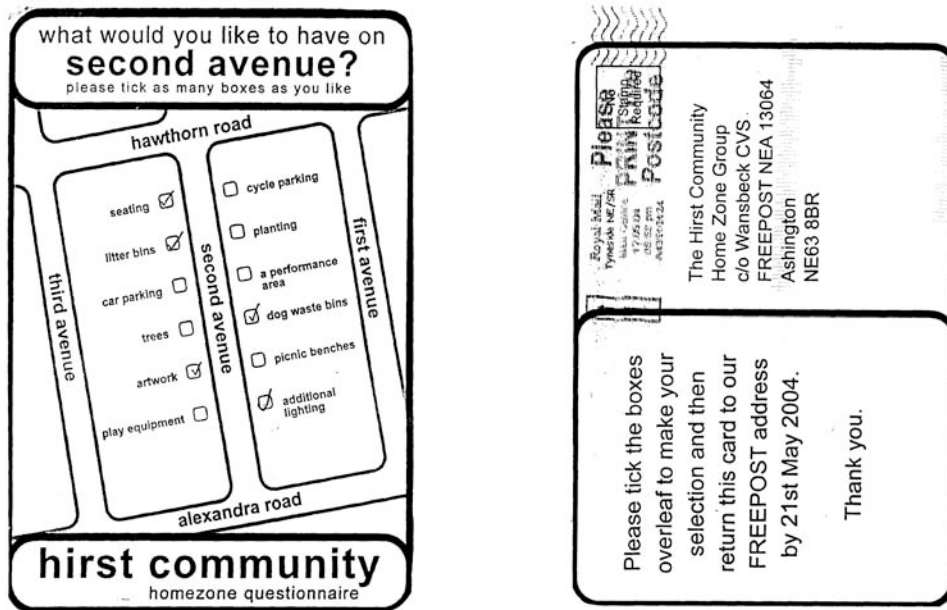


Phase Two

This phase consisted of redesigning the physical layouts of Second Avenue. There was a significant level of consultation that took place between NCC officers and the residents of Second Avenue and its environs.

Firstly, a questionnaire was distributed to 1200 homes (see figure 5), which was aimed at gathering the preferences of residents about the type and nature of physical improvements that were required. The majority of the 1200 questionnaires were completed and returned (via Freepost). The results were analysed by NCC officers and the results were returned to the residents for further comment, via a Wansbeck CVS newsletter, specifically produced for this purpose¹⁵.

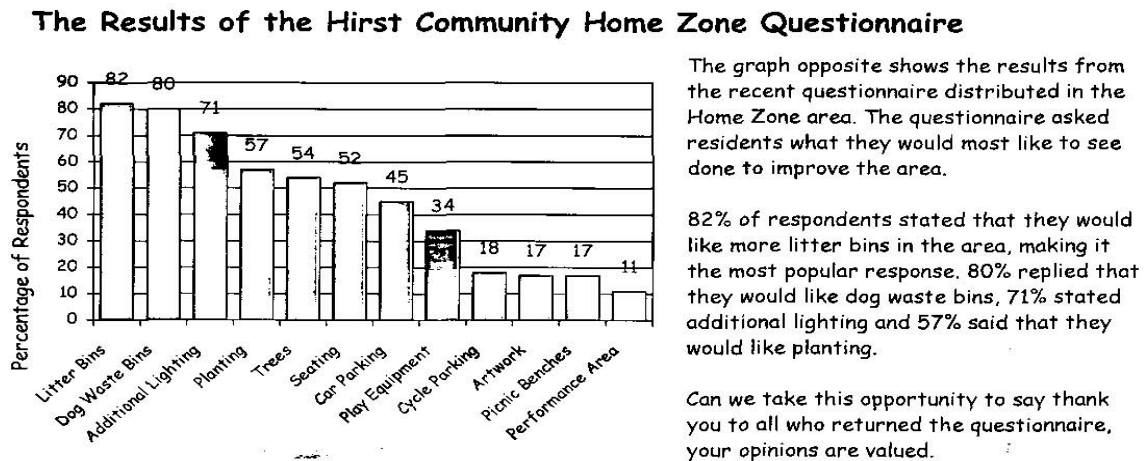
Figure 5. Questionnaire



Source: NCC, 2004

Figure 6 shows the results of this consultation. It is worthy of note that 17% of respondents stated that they would like to see artwork in the Home Zone.

Figure 6. Results of the Consultation



Source: Hirst Community Home Zone Newsletter, Issue 3, Summer 2004.

Many of the responses from the residents indicated a desire for physical improvements that were outside the funding remit of the LTP. In response to this situation, the NNC developed a bid (using the results of the consultation) that was submitted to the Wansbeck Initiative. They were successful in securing £121,000 over one year for the greening and beautifying elements of the development. As a condition of the funding, the Home Zone project had to involve the Inspire project, via the Public Art and Design Officer, and earmarked approximately £21,000 for public art development.

Box 3. Community Organisations That Supported the Development

There were two organisations that provided support to the community consultation and engagement process and acted as key drivers of change.

Wansbeck CVS are a central part of the Hirst Community Home Zone and have provided a range of support to local residents. They set up the Community Empowerment Team (CET) to provide support for community projects. They produce a quarterly newsletter, providing information and updating residents about the development and as a method of consultation. They have also arranged study visits for residents, taking them to other areas around the country which also have Home Zone developments and they have supported the consultation events.

East Ashington Development Trust have also been an important support agency for the community in facilitating events and distributing information. The latter have the advantage of being physically located in the community and in supporting local businesses and social enterprises.

NCC's Landscape Architect developed three street designs, based upon the residents' responses. There followed a series of well attended consultation events in local venues, some of which were open to all residents of the area, and some only invited residents living near to the development. The designs were debated at these meetings (a timeline of consultation activities and meetings can be found in appendix 3).

At the end of this process, one design was chosen that was an amalgamation of all three original designs, incorporating some elements of all.

Introduction of Public Art Into the Home Zone

In September 2004, the Public Art and Design Officer attended a steering group meeting, attended by approximately 15 people, and presented a series of examples of appropriate work from five suitable artists that he had identified from his artists database. The objective of this presentation was to demonstrate types of artwork that could be implemented in such a space as a Home Zone, rather than examples of pieces of work that the residents could choose. He also indicated that the timescales were very short, as a result of funding conditions.

The residents who attended the group said they would discuss the proposals and talk to other residents about it. The presentation was copied by NCC and distributed to residents.

After two weeks, a decision was made by residents which expressed a preference for three artists from the copied presentation. The residents wanted a trail of small artworks along their street and chose two artists to carry out the work.

As a result of the choices being made by residents on paper, i.e. from the copied presentations, and there being no discussions, the preferred artists were not appropriate for their project. One was not appropriate because she did not want to replicate a piece of art that the residents group particularly wanted. Also she did not want to involve the community, which was also wanted by the residents group. The other artist was not appropriate as he produced work that was not suitable for outside spaces and could not be used for what the residents group wanted.

As a result of this, the Public Art and Design Officer proposed an artist who was the residents' third choice and informed the residents and the NCC that he had all the relevant qualities that would be needed for a project such as this, for example, he had completed similar schemes in the past, to deadline and to budget, he involved the community as an artistic approach and had people skills. As such, the Public Art and Design Officer stated that it had to be that particular artist.

The Landscape Architect contacted the Public Art and Design Officer to say that the "*residents felt they were being steamrollered into things*". In the light of this, the Public Art and Design Officer commissioned the artist to come and meet with the residents group and make a presentation in November 2004. The artist spent an evening with the residents and they struck up an immediate understanding and they liked his work.

After the artist's visit, the Landscape Architect again contacted the Public Art and Design Officer to say that the residents had liked the artist and would like his art to be used on Second Avenue. NCC and the residents also stated that they would like the artist to run workshops in the local community and in local schools.

The Public Art and Design Officer wrote this into the artist's contract but did not stipulate that work from these workshops had to be incorporated into the final artwork.

At the end of November, the artist again visited the area and ran two workshops; one day with two local schools (where the topic was 'imagine what was underground'); and a one day open workshop with residents of Second Avenue. After this visit, the artist had a very short time to develop proposals. He proposed two mining seats, two mine shaft sculptures and two flooring designs (which incorporated designs done by children at the school workshops).

In early January 2005, the artist presented his proposals to the residents. He explained the designs' relationship with the local mining history and how the art, in both abstract and literal forms, had attempted to portray this. The proposals were unanimously agreed through a residents' vote. At the end of March the art was installed (with the exception of the flooring which is being installed in Phase Three) and there was a big press launch.

At that time, the residents were apprehensive of the art development. There were general feelings of concern in relation to the rushed nature of the art proposals and many residents were felt to be uncertain of the final result.

Phase Three

This stage has recently been started and consists of spreading the development to other parts of the Hirst Community. It should be noted that there are no funds for greening or beautification, as there was in phase two and so the development was predominantly about traffic calming and safety measures. However, as part of the LTP's Safe Routes to School funding stream (and as there is a school at one end of the community) it was possible to incorporate the artists flooring designs into a route that traverses the entire community. This gives the art in Second Avenue a level of continuity and flow. What also makes the flooring route (or carpet) have added significance is that the artist used some designs from children that were developed in the workshops at local schools.

Discussion

There were a number of difficulties that were overcome to deliver this project:

- Second Avenue is a terraced street with a mixture of ownership types (some private, some council) which presented some problems with consultation.
- The street was a difficult public space in which to develop public art, as the space was restricted by the houses and the other Home Zone developments and there was little room for public art.
- The project had six months in which to complete all the development stages, including consultation, commissioning, contractual agreements, planning, execution, etc, a process which would normally take 18 months.

The tight timescale has major influences on the level of community engagement (which is a time consuming process) and the type of artist that can be commissioned (i.e. an artist must be selected who can produce quality work to budget and to timescale).

- The initial presentation carried out by the Public Art and Design Officer concerned solutions to artwork in the space of Second Avenue and in the presentation he spoke about such issues. When the presentation was photocopied and distributed, it was seen 'cold' with no explanation or introduction. It appeared to residents reading the presentation that these were the art options they could choose, and indeed, they chose three; two of which were unsuitable.

Despite these problems, the public art development was completed on time and within budget and received a positive reaction from residents and professionals.

Reaction to the Public Art

The residents of Second Avenue felt that there was not long enough to be properly consulted on the public art.

"Something like this takes quite a lot of thought".

"The artist comes and tells us what he wants to do, we go away and think about it and before you know it you have to go with what's on the table".

Residents felt that if more time was taken over the process the result could have been different, for example, *"the bath tubs are wrong, they would have been oval".*

Despite feeling rushed, residents did attach value to the art, for example, residents noted that the art has become a discussion point for residents, particularly for people living outside the Avenue.

“It does interest people walking past ... we had a couple of visitors who said they like it and were interested in it”.

Residents also felt that the role of the art is to raise questions, which they said it does, *“if it raises questions it’s doing its job”.*

Residents commented that the development would suffer if the art element was not included:

“It would be worse if it [the art] wasn’t there”.

However, there are significant feelings of disappointment and unhappiness amongst local residents because of problems associated with vandalism to the project, particularly to the flowers and planting beds (but not the art) and this detracts from the appreciation of the art. These issues ensure that the Residents’ Committee will continue to meet.

In relation to the impact the art has on the perceptions of residents and how they feel about living in the area, it was felt that art must be located with other socio-economic indicators, for example, *“art would have something if the area had something”*, i.e. the art would be better if the area was better. However, it was also felt that the development was part of a regeneration process, *“it’s start of a process to build up the quality of life”.*

It is worthy of note that after the interviews about the public art on Second Avenue, there ensued a discussion about art and its purpose. One resident stated *“whether or not it’s good art doesn’t matter, it’s whether it raises interest which is important”.*

The Landscape Architect, who played a central role to the Home Zone and the designs and consultation, recognised the time pressures faced by the Inspire Programme and realised that without Inspire the art element would not have been achieved, *“had Richard not been in place we wouldn’t have been able to spend the money on the art”.*

There was considerable praise by the Landscape Architect for the Public Art and Design Officer and the residents alike, for example, *“I think they [the residents] were very brave but a lot of that was down to Richard ... he was the right person for the job”.* Much of the praise concerned the Public Art and Design Officer’s artistic knowledge and understanding, e.g. *“what Richard produced was spot on, he showed excellent professional judgement”.*

Conclusions

The main problem concerning the art development within the Home Zone project was not having enough time to adequately discuss the art or familiarise residents with the artistic process. However, having noted this, the art receives a generally positive reaction from the residents, particularly in raising local interest and as a point of discussion.

The public art component of the Home Zone was a result of an explicit funding requirement of the source of funds; the Wansbeck Initiative. The following statements from the manager of the Wansbeck Initiative allude to the level of commitment to public art on a strategic level, with a focus on regeneration.

In relation to the Second Avenue Home Zone, the manager stated:

'I think the principle reason it was funded is that the partners [of the Wansbeck Initiative] recognise the fact that where you live can have a dramatic impact on how you feel, behave and engage - this project is more than just street art and furniture, it enables the community to come together in a safe space, tackles road safety, promotes community cohesion and civic pride¹⁸.

And more broadly about public art, she states:

'I am a firm believer in the need for attractive and engaging public spaces ... Having a clean, safe, green and attractive public space is really important as a foundation to everything else we [the Wansbeck Initiative] are trying to achieve in terms of raising aspirations, skills and education attainment, getting people back into work, reducing crime/fear of crime, increasing community cohesion, improving housing and services. I am trying to promote creativity as well through the Partnership - we have established a Creativity Themed Group which will be advising the partners on how to be more creative, introduce creativity and culture into aspects of their work¹⁹.

It was felt by the Landscape Architect that the approach taken and used by the Hirst Community Home Zone and the public art within it could be used in other places, although it was recognised that more time was needed, "*I would do it again and I would recommend it but I would say you need more time ...*".

Indeed, the entire process demonstrated how local residents and professional organisations could work together and one professional stated that "*a good relationship developed between the residents and the service providers*". This sentiment was also echoed by local residents. As a result of this, and despite the time restrictions, "[the art and the development] *belongs to the Hirst Community*".

Similar to the Newbiggin Sailing Club example, this study has demonstrated how public art can add value to an existing regeneration initiative and bring interest and discussion to local people.

Finally, it is worthy of note that the art concerns local heritage. The Public Art and Design Officer commented on this subject:

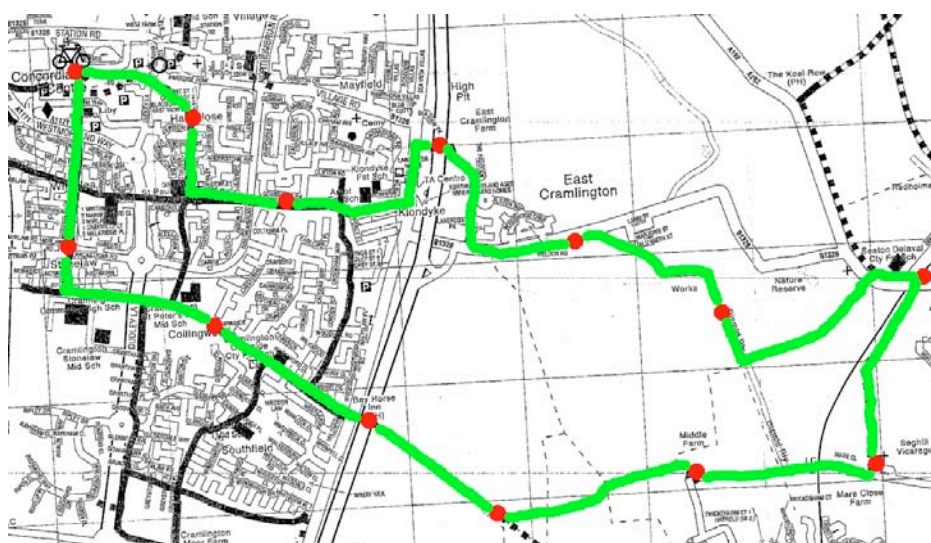
“I am always asked about mining but am reluctant [to commission art with mining as the subject] because it’s a bit backward looking and there is a mining museum right here... but with the right artist it can be interesting and forward looking”.

Wildspace Network

Introduction

The Wildspace Network is an existing extensive network of public footpaths, tracks and bridleways in Blyth Valley, with many parts that are well used by walkers and cyclists and others less well used. Inspire's proposals for the public art development consist of a series of pieces of art located on a circular six mile section of the Wildspace Network, starting at the Concordia Leisure Centre in Cramlington. See map below.

Map 1. The Wildspace Network Art Trail



Background

The Inspire programme is mainly funded through the Single Programme which is administered by the Northumberland Strategic Partnership. There are contributions from each of the three local authorities and the total budget of £360,000 over three years, includes costs for the post of the Public Art and Design Officer and an assistant. Within the budget £120,000 is allocated for commissions in Wansbeck; Blyth Valley Borough Council did not wish to spend more on public art at the inception of the programme, other than the £80,000 on the Wildspace Network using funds it had obtained from the New Opportunities Fund (this is part of the Fairshare Funding scheme) to be spent through the Inspire programme.

The financial contributions represent a buy-in from both WDC and BVBC (and nominally from NCC). However, the nature of those financial contributions has an impact on where the money can be spent and on the nature of the art developments. For example, art development in Wansbeck has no restrictions

and can be invested in any location. However, the money in Blyth Valley can only be spent on the Wildspace Network.

Development Process

There are three stages in the development process that are detailed here: identification of the siting and distance of the trail; identification of artists; consultation; and application for planning.

Identification of the Trail

The Public Art and Design Officer decided to focus the artwork along a six and a half mile circular section of the route, with one piece of art approximately every half mile, starting at the Concordia in Cramlington. This decision was based upon:

- The need to engage interest and focus concentration in a small area to create a critical mass for attracting tourists²⁰.
- The route passes through two urban areas: Cramlington and Seaton Delaval.
- The circular nature of the route meant that people did not have to retrace their steps.
- The Concordia is a major retail and public area where many existing walks start and so the Network is easier to advertise and makes it very accessible.

Figure 7. Example of Art Pieces Along the Trail: Footsteps in the Snow



Consultation

The project used a series of methods and opportunities in which to consult with local residents, organisations and authorities. These are presented in the following sections.

Identification of Artists

The project took an inclusive approach to selecting the artists for the trail. Firstly, the Public Art and Design Officer identified 13 artists from across the country from Inspire's artists database. The list was then narrowed down to eight artists chosen through discussions in July 2004 between Inspire, Blyth Valley Borough Council, Northumberland Care Trust and CONE (a local health, environment and wildlife partnership). These eight artists were then invited to make site visits and develop proposals.

In December 2004, two public presentations were given by all eight artists that had been selected. The first was held at the Seghill Institute Community Centre. All relevant council officers and all councillors were invited by letter, as well as local organisations. The presentations were open to the general public. Approximately 10 people attended and they gave positive feedback.

The second was held at the Concordia Leisure Centre, where the remaining artists presented their work and ideas. Similarly, proposals were well received. All relevant council officers and all councillors were invited by letter, as well as local organisations. The presentations were open to the general public. A total of six people attended and again, gave positive feedback.

Figure 8. Example of Art Pieces Along the Trail: Capella



Area Assemblies

One of the most important groups to be consulted were area assemblies within Blyth Valley.

There are two administrative organisations that are affected by the trail. These are the Cramlington Area Assembly (CAA) and the Seaton Valley Assembly (SVA). There are three assemblies in Blyth Valley (including the Blyth Valley Assembly²¹, each with a budget from BVBC of approximately £100,000). These assemblies are tasked with encouraging the involvement of the local community in issues affecting the local community. They can also be used by the council and other relevant organisations to consult on specific issues. They are attended by local organisations, councillors, representatives of the community and local residents.

Both assemblies endorsed the project and the CAA contributed £10,000 of public money to the development of the art along the network in their area (a lighting scheme located in an underpass with a total value of £40,000). The endorsement from the assemblies was critical for the art development in order to provide a mandate for the project, and particularly as BVBC is committed to community involvement.

In January 2005, the Public Art and Design Officer gave a presentation to the CAA concerning the eight proposals for the trail, which included comments that were received at the artists' public presentations.

The event was attended by approximately 40 people and the main topic on the agenda was the allocation of the £100,000 improvement budget.

There was a strong positive reaction to the art trail and there were two important outcomes of that meeting. The first was a formal letter of support for the project from the Chair of the Assembly. The second was a £10,000 contribution from the Assembly's £100,000 annual improvement budget to an A189 underpass lighting scheme, which forms part of the trail and runs through the Assembly's catchment area. There was also a recommendation made by the Assembly to consult with young people at Cramlington High School.

On the basis of this recommendation, the Public Art and Design Officer contacted the school and subsequently made a presentation to a group of students, showing proposed artworks. There was enthusiastic support for the project, particularly *Eating for England* and *Capella*.

In February 2005, the Public Art and Design Officer was invited by the SVA, to an Assembly meeting, to coincide with public discussions about how to allocate the Assembly's £100,000 improvement budget.

There were approximately 40 participants, made up of residents, council officers and councillors. Participants were mostly, although not exclusively, men and there were none under 30 years of age.

Figure 9. Example of Art Pieces Along the Trail: Eating for England



The topics on the agenda were improvements to Astley Park in Seaton Delaval, gateways²² and public art. It was felt by the Assembly that the topic of the Wildspace Network would fit very well into items on the agenda.

The Assembly had decided that they did not want a simple presentation from the Public Art and Design Officer, but wanted a more interactive approach and so a workshop style was adopted. The reasons for this was that most frequently, people came and did presentations, then left; a one-way form of delivery which was generally unsatisfactory for the Assembly participants.

There were three rotating workshops at this session where people spent 30 minutes discussing each topic. At the workshop on the Wildspace Network, people were shown a brief slide show and then encouraged to have a critical discussion.

A few of the participants were very critical of the more modern pieces of art, but the majority were supportive and interested in the proposal.

It was felt that the participants of the Assembly were not interested at the first point of contact with Inspire, but they became interested after contact and discussion.

The Chair of the Assembly felt that the Public Art and Design Officer's approach was significantly more interactive than other organisations that had made presentations and was indeed the best contact of this nature (i.e. of a public development) than any of the many previous contacts that the Assembly had received from outside organisations. She felt that the Public Art and Design Officer had kept them informed and updated on a regular and detailed basis, which was appreciated.

This contact and discussion resolved a series of issues of possible conflict. For example, many participants had queried why no local artists had been chosen and many had no appreciation of how the art connected with local issues. The Public Art and Design Officer explained that no local artists were suitable and explained about how commissioned artists carried out local research. The Chair stated, "*people weren't scared of new ideas but wanted things talked about and explained*". The Assembly provided this necessary opportunity for the Public Art and Design Officer. The Chair also stated, "*it's about sharing information, [Inspire] has been good at doing that ... need a debate and discussion and they [Inspire] did that*".

The Chair of the Assembly felt that public art was important in the local public domain for its role in stimulating discussion and thought.

"We're good at memorials but we need to concentrate on other things, [for example] there's three schools which have pit wheels as their badges ... we need to build an identity that's theirs [young people's] and not their grandfathers²³".

There was also an appreciation by the Assembly that public art contributes to the wider regeneration process, going alongside other key areas such as employment and health.

The fact that the public art was part of a trail was also felt to be important as it challenged an historic isolation which is common in the old pit villages, despite them being closed since the 1960s. "*The trail connects places, the old people want to maintain their villages and their views, but young people want connectivity, they want to know and go to things that are happening in other places*".

Blyth Valley Borough Council

The project engaged directly with BVBC in a number of ways.

As the project was conceived within the Local Authority, the Public Art and Design Officer was initially involved with discussions with six BVBC council

officers, including the Head of Leisure and the Ecology, Sustainability, Walking and Environment Officers.

Although funding had already been secured by the Local Authority, it was felt that the development of the art trail was not a strategic priority for BVBC. There was a low level of interest in the development and no specific council officer had overall management responsibilities. To counteract this, the Public Art and Design Officer became the lead person and greatly emphasised the importance of the project to other officers, particularly if the first installations were a success, and stressed the trail's potential to be a major attraction for the area.

The project also engaged directly with the BVBC Cabinet²⁴ to gain political approval for the project. In November 2004, the Public Art and Design Officer presented the scope of the project, the proposals for the trail, previous work by short listed artists and the Public Art Policy²⁵, which was consequently adopted.

Political approval was also sought by contacting all the councillors who were affected by the trail in Blyth Valley, informing them of the project and inviting them to consultation events and artists presentations.

In December 2004, a major public seminar was organised by Inspire, where the Wildspace Network was presented. All councillors in Blyth Valley were invited, along with local organisations, businesses and community groups. The event was well attended.

It should be noted that few councillors attended the events or presentations.

Other Organisations

An additional piece of consultation was carried out by the Public Art and Design Officer with the members of the Holy Trinity Church in Seghill in January 2005. This organisation was consulted as part of the trail passes the Church and there were proposals for locating a piece of art in or next to the Church. The Public Art and Design Officer attended a Church Council Meeting at the Church to present the proposals for the Wildspace Network. The meeting was attended by around 15 people, both men and women, aged from 50 to 80 years old. There was considerable interest from the participants about the public art, although there was some discussion about the suitability of some pieces for the Church. There was also a mixture of feelings from the participants about the need for the art to celebrate local heritage and look forward to the future.

The issue of representativeness was raised, as the Church Council is made up of older people, although it was felt that "*only a minority [of people] want to be involved anyway ... the Church Council were impressed [with the proposals] although not many want to be involved but are for it*"²⁶.

The Public Art and Design Officer also brought the selected artist to visit the Church and they were introduced to the vicar and some Church staff. The fact that the artist had visited the area and carried out their own research was particularly appreciated by the Church.

It was felt that the art trail would take time to have an impact, “*on the whole things like this enhance an area ... maybe not in the beginning but in the end*”²⁷.

Planning Permission

Inspire had made a series of efforts to communicate and create a dialogue with the elected Council via councillors and more specifically the Planning Committee, who ultimately grant permission for the work.

In February 2005, the Wildspace Network Steering Group²⁸ endorsed the recommendation of the Public Art Officer to apply for Cabinet approval for planning applications for the following pieces of art; *Capella*, *Eating For England*, *Footprints In The Snow* and the A189 Underpass lighting scheme, as the first phase of the development of the art trail.

In March 2005, there was an approval by the BVBC Cabinet for Inspire to submit a planning application for three artworks (*Eating for England* was not submitted as it was to be located on private land and the land owner’s permission had not yet been granted). Details submitted include images, brief description and route/site locations.

In April 2005, an application for planning permission was submitted and there were no objections lodged with the Development Control Department (this is the planning committee which is made up of elected members).

In June, the Development Control Panel granted approval for the A189 lighting scheme. However, a decision on *Capella* and *Footprints In The Snow* was deferred to allow for discussion with the Public Art and Design Officer. Concerns were raised by one councillor over the aesthetic and thematic suitability of the two pieces for their proposed locations, and the overall relevance to local history.

It was felt by other Blyth Valley councillors that the objections were raised as a result of personal feelings rather than broader public concerns. The majority of councillors were very supportive of the proposals and were very appreciative of the Inspire project. One councillor stated, “[The Public Art and Design Officer] *put in a lot of effort to talk and communicate, made presentations, talked with councillors*”.

Discussion

The Wildspace Network is an unique Inspire project in many ways:

- The development can only be carried out along the trail as a result of NOF funding restrictions, i.e. it is a given. This has other strategic implications for art development in Blyth (see later).
- This project may have taken place in the absence of the Inspire Programme. However, the Inspire Programme has had a major impact on the project by introducing a significant level of artistic expertise that previously did not exist. In many respects this has turned the project around, from one which may have been a basic woodland trail to a potential network of highly professional and regionally remarkable professional pieces of art.
- The trail, although passing near to local communities, does not directly impact on any communities, as it is a largely rural network. This makes it difficult to consult with local people. In response to this, Inspire has identified and consulted with the most relevant local groups including Community Assemblies, councillors who represent their constituents, schools and local interest groups.

It appears from the research that the proposed trail has been well received but there have been divisive issues in relation to particular pieces of art from a minority. These issues largely relate to the modernity of some of the art pieces and the fact that they do not adequately reflect or celebrate local history. However, there is also division of opinion in relation to this topic, with many people feeling that the area has sufficiently celebrated their local history and now it is time 'to move on' and provide something of note for young people. Indeed, several people consulted stated that the concentration on past identity actively held progress back and there was a need to break the community isolations of the past.

Conclusion

The research has demonstrated that the Inspire project has carried out significant consultation with those relevant democratic structures and local organisations that were available. The fact that these structures were not representative of the general public (being predominantly made up of older people) and were often poorly attended can not be used to criticise Inspire's approach. The Inspire Programme has correctly used (often over and above expected duties) due process with which to consult and engage with local people.

Indeed, where there has been consultation, despite some initial scepticism, the proposals for the trail have been well received and supported. All of the community representatives that were interviewed believed that the public art was an important aspect of the regeneration process and that the trail would eventually lead to local and regional recognition and would be something that local people would be proud of.

On a more strategic level in relation to public art development in Blyth, as a result of the funding allocation (see the background section to this case study for an explanation of funding allocations), it has not been possible for Inspire to carry out any other art developments in the urban areas of Blyth Valley, which are important regeneration locations. This is in contrast to Wansbeck, where money can and is being spent in the urban areas. This creates a disparity in what can be achieved in Wansbeck and Blyth.

In light of this, art development in a rural setting was not considered a strategic development, as it was not an area of high population as the numbers of people seeing the art would be relatively small. Furthermore, it was not seen as an investment area. However, the development has been 'turned around' into a strategic development through the nature of the artworks, the intention of the trail becoming a major tourist attraction and running the trail through two urban areas (Cramlington and Seaton Delaval). The start of the trail has also been located in the urban area of Cramlington. This welcomed was by people in Cramlington as the area is considered to be one of under investment in comparison to Blyth.

"Cramlington people feel that they are ignored by the presence of Blyth ... they think that all of the money is going there ... the art meant that Cramlington got something³⁰".

As a result of where the start of the trail is located, it is hoped that the Inspire Programme can lever in additional funding for other artworks in Cramlington town.

This Inspire project has experienced some difficulties, created by a minority of local people. In light of this resistance, the Public Art and Design Officer made some illuminating comments, which are presented below.

“I have to make apologies to move forward”.

“I am here to change attitudes”.

“I’ve got to take people with me on a journey”.

Research With Young People

Research with young people consisted of two focus groups, one in Blyth and one in Wansbeck, together with a review of existing research with young people in both areas.

One focus group took place in the Healthy Living Centre in Guidepost in Wansbeck and was attended by six young people (one female and five males), between 13 and 17.

The second focus group took place in The Point, a community and youth centre, in Blyth. There were a total of eight young people from the ages of 14 to 19; four females and four males.

The discussion with the young people was divided into two parts. The first part of the discussion concerned how they felt about living in the area and their appreciation of public and its impact. This was then followed by a short presentation where the young people were showed photographs of current and proposed Inspire projects. There was then a discussion about public art in light of the presentation.

The findings are presented by area. The review of existing research is firstly presented, followed by a presentation of the focus group findings.

Young People in Blyth

Previous research with young people has demonstrated that almost two thirds of young people living in Blyth were satisfied with where they live.

The Young People's Lifestyle Survey (2003) ³² showed that 65% of 11 to 15 year olds and 5% of 16 to 24 year olds living in Blyth Valley were satisfied with where they live. The same survey showed that 54% of 11 to 15 year olds and 37% of 16 to 24 year olds living in Blyth Valley thought that their local area had improved (Information by Design, 2005).

The Young People Lifestyle Survey (2003) also showed that over 80% of young people in Blyth were happy on most days (*ibid*, 2005).

In early 2005, a group of young people made a film about what most concerned them about living in Blyth (For a copy of the film, contact The Point, 45-49 Bowes Street, Blyth, NE24 1EB). The film covered topics including the area's image, culture, facilities and safety.

During the film the young people made many comments about public art, including expressing their appreciation of art in Newcastle, such as the Blue Carpet outside the Laing Art Gallery, the public seating on Northumberland Street and the Sage Gateshead.

There was an appreciation of local architecture, "*some of the buildings would look great if they were lit up at night*".

Young people were particularly keen on functional developments, such as the improvements of telephone points, seating areas and bicycle lock-ups.

They also felt that distinctive public art was important for Blyth, "*having a landmark is very important for a city, it helps build character*".

Specifically in relation to the Spirit of the Staithes, the young people said, "*we may all have different opinions about [the Spirit of the Staithes] it ... 'I think it's a waste of money', ... 'I think it's fantastic' ... 'well, at least it's getting people talking and that's a good thing'*". In the film, the young people stated that they thought Blyth Quayside was a good place to exhibit art as it is an area of regeneration, "*it shows that Blyth is trying to bring itself into the twenty first century*". It was also felt that the area's historical heritage should be incorporated into public art and celebrated.

The young people thought that it was important not only to develop the centre of Blyth but also to spread the developments, including art, into the outlying areas.

Young people also expressed that they would like an area where they could show their artwork.

Blyth Focus Group Findings

All of the group members were from the town of Blyth. All of the group members regularly travelled throughout the area, including weekly visits to Newcastle, Cramlington, Morpeth and occasionally to Ashington. However, the majority of their time is spent in Blyth town, especially in the evenings.

All of the group members said that they did not like Blyth with comments including, "*it's not colourful, not interesting*", "*it's full of junk*" and "*other people think it's rubbish ... it's backward*". However, there was a feeling that the town did have significant potential, "*it could be so much more ... as if it's sitting on its arse*".

There was a feeling that the facilities in Blyth are aimed at and intended for older people, for example, "*there's two [shopping] arcades, loads of bookies, pubs, charity shops*". As a result of this, it was felt by the group that older people tended to be satisfied with Blyth, unlike themselves. Group members also said that younger people wanted excitement, which older people did not want.

When asked whether they intended to stay in the area as they got older, all but two of the group said they intended to leave. However, those saying they would leave, stated they would stay in the North East, with most saying they would like to go and live in Newcastle. Also, those who said they would leave said they would not return to Blyth to live, "*only to visit*".

However, many members of the group said that if the image of the area and the available facilities improved, they would stay in the area.

When the topic of history was discussed there was a mixed reaction; some members of the group felt that it was important that the industrial past should be remembered and celebrated, other members felt that imagery should become more modern and others felt that there should be a mixture of the old and new. Comments included, "*we need a place like Beamish here*", "*shouldn't dwell upon it ... should move on*" and "*should remember it but not live it*".

The group felt that public art was valuable to an area, "*attracts people and makes people think*". It was also felt, similar to the sentiments expressed in the film, that art should be sited in different places, "*should brighten up the darker areas*". Group members thought that art should be functional, "*would be nice to have some seats [like Northumberland Street]*".

All of the group members said they would like to be involved in the development of the public art themselves.

On reflection of the presentation given by the Public Art and Design Officer, all of the group members were very enthusiastic about the examples of public art and the explanations given by the Officer. The Eating for England piece was

unanimously liked, *“we need a big spoon in Blyth ... we need a big spade in Isabella heap!”*.

The group felt that the kind of art that Inspire had developed was a good way of representing history, *“it’s important to experiment with the old and the new”*. The process of combining modern with historical was felt by the group to be an inclusive process, *“good to have new and old things together so no-one’s complaining”*.

When asked on what impact the art has on them and the area, group members were very positive, *“might change people’s thoughts on the area ... make it attractive to visit, people from Newcastle would come to visit instead of us visiting them”*, *“modern is good”*, and many said it would have an impact on their decision to leave.

The group felt that the Inspire project seen on the Officer’s presentation were what art should be, *“public art should be interesting not just what people expect it to be”*.

Young People in Wansbeck

In 2005, Wansbeck District Council commissioned research³³ into the aspirations and opinions of 11 to 24 year olds living in the district. The research showed that:

A total of 60% of young people in the survey were satisfied with the area.

There are some differences in the levels of satisfaction within the district, with most dissatisfaction within the area of Newbiggin (although conversely this is the area where there has been most change in the satisfaction levels, with 45% of respondents saying that the area had improved).

- Almost a third (31%) of young people recognised an improvement in the area.
- The research also asked young people an open ended question about what other facilities or improvements they would like to see in their local area. Whilst art was not a response, parks/open space/woodland received the highest number of responses.
- A total of 33% of respondents wanted to leave the area to go to university or find a job.
- The survey also showed that over three quarters of all age ranges felt happy.

Wansbeck Focus Group Findings

All the members of this group came from the area of Guidepost and Stakeford, with the exception of one boy whose family came from Leeds. However, he had come to Guidepost as a baby.

All the members of the group travelled regularly throughout the region, with some going to Newcastle every Saturday, Ashington every Tuesday and some going to the skate park in Morpeth each week. None of the group would go to Blyth. However, for the majority of the time, members of the group stayed in their local area.

When asked what resources that they had in their local area, all members of the group agreed that there was little for them to do, *"it's shite ... there's nowt for us to do ... the only good thing is the park"*.

Three quarters of the group said that they intended to leave the area, with one saying that they would go to London, one to Australia and others simply outside of the region.

When asked whether or not they would return to the area when they were older some said they would, others said they would not.

Members of the group stated that they would stay if the area in which they currently live was better, *"if it's good I'd stay, something to do, somewhere that looks good"*. As an illustration, one participant said *"look outside, look at the roof, look how shite it is"*.

When asked about representations of the area's past, members of the group unanimously agreed that it was *"dwelled upon too much"* and there was a need to *"move on from the past"*. The group felt that they view the world in a different way to older people and for them, they would like to see a more modern built environment. One participant said *"remembrance day things are canny boring, not being disrespectful to old people"*.

When asked about what they thought of public art, the group stated *"depends on what the sculpture is ... if it's for old people then we won't like it"*. One member said that if *"it's eye catching, might attract more people, businesses"*.

All the group members showed an interest and enthusiasm for the slide show of photographs of current and future Inspire projects. Many were surprised by the art and did not imagine public art to be of this nature, particularly in relation to the *Eating for England*, super sized spoon. About this latter piece, one participant stated *"the old people wouldn't like it"*. Many members said that the art would get graffitied.

On reflection of the presentation and the previous discussion, group members agreed that a more attractive, modern and forward-looking environment would make them more inclined to stay, *"more people would come, less people would leave"*.

Group members also expressed their desire to see art used in conjunction with resources that they can use. Members stated that they would like to see sculpture and art in a modern skate park in their area and some said that they would like street furniture, "*build wi some benches 'cos we're sitting on the walls*".

Group members stated that they did not particularly want to be involved in the public art development (unless they were paid) and preferred the art to be in the hands of artists.

Discussion of Findings of Research With Young People

There was a general feeling that both Wansbeck and Blyth hold little interest or facilities for young people and all of the group members were dissatisfied with where they lived. This contradicts information in the research commissioned by Wansbeck District Council, which shows that almost two thirds of young people were satisfied with the area. It was felt that the area's image was poor and there were no suitable facilities for young people.

The young people were unanimously supportive of the Inspire art projects that they saw. They recognised the importance of art in creating an interesting and attractive environment and a 'place to live'. Indeed, young people in Blyth stated that the types of art developed by Inspire, would have an impact on whether or not they chose to leave the area.

It was felt currently that both Wansbeck and Blyth were backward looking but public art would contribute to a more modern and distinctive area, something which the young people felt was very important.

There were some differences in the results from the discussions with the two groups. The group in Blyth expressed a greater desire to see the celebration of the area's heritage, whilst the group from Wansbeck were keen to see no reflection of history in public art. This may possibly be due to the nature of industrial heritage in the two areas; with Wansbeck being a predominantly old coalfield area; and Blyth having a variety of more recent industries including ship building, fishing, coal mining and heavy industry. However, without further research it is difficult to identify why young people in Blyth would like to see a marriage of the old and new in art in their area and why those in Wansbeck do not.

The group in Blyth were very clear about how they felt history should be celebrated; it should include experimentation and consist of a mixture of modern and old. They were supportive of the innovative nature of the Inspire projects which reflected historical elements, such as the Second Avenue Home Zone and the bridge at Ashington.

The group in Blyth were also keen to be involved in the development of the public art, whereas the group in Wansbeck were satisfied that it be left in the hands of the professionals. This may be due to the particular group dynamics, with the group from Blyth having a history of project development. Indeed, the group in Blyth were involved with the development of a mural on a blank wall on a toilet block in Blyth town square.

Conclusion

This evaluation was commissioned to contribute to the judgement of several of Inspire's objectives.

The first of these was **Objective 2: Increase the attractiveness of the environment to: local communities; stakeholder organisations; visitors; and businesses**. The indicators or evidence for judging whether this objective has been achieved was the level of support for public art within local communities and stakeholder organisations.

Based on the evidence gathered through research for this aspect of the evaluation, we can conclude that there has been support from local communities and stakeholder organisations and the programme has increased the attractiveness of the environment to local communities; stakeholder organisations and visitors (no businesses were consulted). In addition to this statement, it should be noted in one case study there was some resistance by a minority of community members to specific pieces of art and feelings that insufficient attention was being paid to heritage. However, in the same case study, the majority of stakeholders were supportive of Inspire, particularly as the programme had paid specific attention to the consultation process. In another case study, community members felt not enough time had been spent on the consultation about the art development, although there were very specific reasons for the time constraints. Ultimately, stakeholders felt satisfied with the outcome and were supportive of the public art within their local environment.

Based on the research evidence, the programme has made every effort to consult with and include stakeholders, within its remit for the development of public art. This has led to satisfactory outcomes. It can be concluded that the consultation process, i.e. allowing stakeholders to input their opinions, hold discussions and meet artists, is key to local ownership of public art.

The second of these objectives was **Objective 3: Contribute to the modernisation of the environment and increase its distinctiveness**. The indicators or evidence for judging whether this objective has been achieved was the perceptions of the local environment by young adults (16 – 24) living in the area.

The research with the young people demonstrated that the type of art developed by the Inspire art programme would unequivocally lead to the modernisation of the local environment and increase its distinctiveness. However, these judgements were based on the type of art rather than its physical presence, as the young people consulted had never seen any of the actual Inspire art developments. The young people were very enthusiastic about the Inspire art and expressed considerable support for the modernity of the art. However, the young people recognised the importance of remembering local history and heritage, although in their words, "*not to live it*". Young people and others consulted during the research felt that public art

gave an area a sense of identity and encouraged other people to visit and had an influence on whether residents chose to leave an area.

The third of these objectives was **Objective 4: Ensure that communities and stakeholders are properly engaged in public art and design development.** The indicators or evidence for judging whether this objective has been achieved was the approach to engagement employed by Inspire Officer and the capability and confidence of community participants involved in the public art.

Similar to the judgement on Objective 2 earlier, the research evidence shows that, in the three case studies, the Inspire Officer has made every effort to involve stakeholders in the development of the Inspire public art, often going beyond expected efforts. The research indicates that communities and stakeholders have been properly engaged in the public art and design development in the three case studies. The research also demonstrates that the attention to the consultation process is key to the capability and confidence of community participants involved in the public art development. A process which has been satisfactorily carried out in two out of the three studies (and in the case of the third which experienced time constraints, all efforts were employed by the Inspire Officer to maximise the consultation and engagement process and the best results possible were achieved within the short time frame).

In addition to making a judgement on whether the programme has achieved objectives 2, 3 and 4, this evaluation can make further contributions to the overall programme evaluation.

The evaluation found that it is difficult to involve a representative group of community members in public art projects. This is due to the absence of mechanisms that allow for access to a representative group. Accessible mechanisms, such as community fora are predominantly made up of older people, with often more males than females. Indeed, when the Inspire programme attempted to hold public meetings in accessible areas, there was a very low participation rate. This may indicate that the majority of community members do not wish to be involved in public art development. It should be noted that this is the case (in these case studies in South East Northumberland) with the more 'public' projects, i.e. the Wildspace Network where the art pieces do not directly affect a specific residential community, and not with projects that affect a specific target group, such as the Newbiggin Sailing Club, which have a committed and enthusiastic user group. In the light of these difficulties, the Inspire programme made significant efforts to identify and consult with as many identified groups as possible, within time and resource restrictions.

It was the intention of the evaluation to attempt to identify if there is any link between feelings of public ownership of public art and the level of stakeholder involvement. Based on the evidence gathered during this part of the evaluation, it can be said that the most important factor in public ownership is process. If stakeholders feel that they have been given sufficient opportunity

to air their views, even (possibly particularly) their negative views, discuss proposals and discuss art, then (in the case studies) they feel a level of ownership and satisfaction. This is further supported by the residents of Second Avenue feeling that the public art development was rushed and they would have liked the opportunity to discuss matters further. However, despite this shortcoming, they were satisfied with the end result.

Another intention of the evaluation was to attempt to determine if there have been any changes in people's sense of place in the case study examples, i.e. do people feel better about living in their local environment and their place within it as a result of being involved in the public art projects. Again the evidence points towards a positive outcome, i.e. they do feel better because of the art and having been involved, even in a consultative manner. Many stakeholders felt that art was lower down the list of socio-economic and environmental improvements, yet its presence gave added value to those improvements. This notion of added value was a theme through two of the case studies. Stakeholders were surprised about the positive impact of the art in the context of an existing development and how it beautified an area and produced a focal point for discussion.

Appendix 1. Methodology

This evaluation attempted to identify and interview the most relevant stakeholders who had been most involved with the development of the public art. It was this focus which was intended to make the evaluation as participatory as possible, i.e. asking those who had participated in the art development process their thoughts and opinions on the art and the process.

These stakeholders differed in each case study and these are presented below.

Newbiggin Sailing Club

Semi-structured interview with the Commodore (i.e. the Chairperson) of the Sailing Club. The Commodore had been involved with the Sailing Club for several years and had been instrumental in the restructuring of the Club and the renovation and extension of its physical location.

Semi-structured interview with the Public Art and Design Officer.

Informal discussions, over one morning, with members of the general public who used the physical space where the paintings are located. A total of 15 members of the public were interviewed, with some very fleeting discussions, i.e. Question, "*What do you think of the art?*"; Response, "*Aye, it's OK*", to others which lasted for five minutes about the impact it has had on the town centre.

It was initially planned to interview the same members of the Club who had been involved in the selection of the artists and pieces of art. However, through conversations with the Commodore, it proved to be a too difficult and inconvenient a task for those members to re-congregate for interview. In any event, the Commodore was able to provide sufficient reportage of the selection meetings as he was in attendance.

Second Avenue Home Zone

Semi-structured interview with the NCC Officer who had been centrally involved with the development from the outset.

Semi-structured interview with the Public Art and Design Officer.

Semi-structured interviews with members of community organisations who had been involved with mobilising residents of the community.

Semi-structured discussions with members of the Residents' Association.

It was initially intended to interview members of neighbouring residents groups in the area. However, despite discussions with local community development workers and WDC's Community Development Officer, a suitable group was unable to be located.

Email conversations also took place with the Manager of the Wansbeck Initiative, who had been instrumental in securing funding for the public art development.

Wildspace Network

Semi-structured interviews with community leaders and those involved with the public democratic apparatus in Blyth, (i.e. representatives of the Area Assemblies), including BVBC councillors, the Chair of the SVA and the portfolio holder for Leisure and Culture at BVBC.

Semi-structured interview with the Public Art and Design Officer.

Young People

Research with young people consisted of two focus groups.

One group of young people was identified in Wansbeck through the Young People's Thematic Group of the Wansbeck Initiative, who identified a youth group in a Healthy Living Centre at Guidepost. An additional young people's lifestyle survey was also used for the analysis of young people's opinions in Wansbeck.

Another group was identified by a community organisation in Blyth, called The Point. In this group, under direction from the community organisation, £10.00 high street gift vouchers were given to participants as a way of saying thank you for taking part. A film, made young people at The Point, about young people's thoughts and opinions of their physical environment and living in Blyth was also used in the analysis of young people's views in Blyth.

Appendix 2. People and Organisations Interviewed

Name	Position	Organisation
Richard Hollinshead	Public Art and Design Officer	Inspire
Christine Reay	Landscape Architect	Northumberland County Council
Commodore Dave Futers	Chairperson	Newbiggin Sailing Club
Amanda Sayers	Training and Development Worker	Wansbeck CVS
Neil Batt	Project Development Officer	East Ashington Development Trust
Barry Crowther	Councillor	BVBC
Bernard Pidcock	Councillor	BVBC
Susan Dungworth	Councillor	BVBC
Declan Baharini (consulted via email)	Manager	Wansbeck Initiative
Ian Faulkner	Vicar	Holy Trinity Church Seghill (Newcastle Diocese)
Young People in Wansbeck		
Young People in Blyth		
Residents of Newbiggin		
Residents of Second Avenue, Ashington		

Appendix 3. Timeline of Consultation for the Second Avenue Home Zone

2001	The project developed following concerns raised originally through the Hirst Community Forum regarding the need for environmental improvement, the need to reduce vehicle speeds and a lack of play space. A bid was submitted to the Home Zone Challenge Fund in October 2001 but was unsuccessful.
2002	Northumberland County Council in partnership with Wansbeck District Council secure funding through the Local Transport Plan (LTP).
October 2002	Consultation process begins with a leaflet drop. Leaflets inform residents what a Home Zone is and ask for their comments on some common concerns (street lighting, traffic calming, parking, introduction of trees, seats, play) and any additional views. Drop-in events held on 9th and 10th October, 2002. Street lighting a major concern.
November 2002	Proposals drawn up, which included improvements to street lighting. Upgrading and providing new 'street end' paving at all the entry points to the Home Zone from First and Third Avenues. Letters were sent out to all the properties within the Home Zone to ask residents to comment on the proposals or any other aspects of the home zone.
March 2003	Invitation sent out to all those that responded to previous consultations to join 'Focus Group'.
April 2003	Hirst Home Zone Meeting - establishment of a 'Focus Group' ¹ (Residents). Establishment of Steering Group of officers from Northumberland County Council, Wansbeck District Council, Wansbeck Community Voluntary Service, East Ashington Development Trust, Northern Coalfield Property Company, Police, Greening for Growth and representatives from the residents group.
July 2003	Environmental Projects Team asked to become involved in the street design.
September 2003	Home Zone Day. Community Event, where a section of Second Avenue was closed to vehicular traffic.

November 2003	<p>Consultation letter sent out to all Home Zone residents regarding the proposals for upgrading the zebra crossings at Second Avenue's junctions with Alexandra Road and Hawthorn Road to puffin crossings. Works to slow traffic in the vicinity of the junctions was also proposed, as a first phase to the overall Home Zone treatment.</p> <p>A group of residents and officers visit the Methley's Home Zone in Leeds. Where there was the opportunity for residents from the Hirst to discuss various issues with the residents from the Methley's.</p> <p>The Big Home Zone Event, residents and officers travelled to Leicester to attend the conference.</p>
January 2004	<p>First copy of resident's newsletter, 'Zone Talk', distributed to all properties within the Home Zone (some 1200 homes). Produced quarterly to keep the residents up to date with developments.</p>
February 2004	<p>Social Evening.</p>
April 2004	<p>Hirst Community Home Zone Group established with constitution.</p>
May 2004	<p>Hirst Community Home Zone questionnaire sent out to all 1200 homes. 'What would you like to have on Second Avenue?'</p>
July 2004	<p>Street Event. Consultation on the three options began when they were displayed as part of the Street Event celebrating the official opening of the East Ashington Development Trust Office, 82 Beatrice Street, Second Avenue.</p>
August 2004	<p>Consultation meetings with 48 households within 3 doors of Second Avenue take place over four evenings. A further two meetings held in the Salvation Army Hall, where all remaining residents of the Home Zone had the opportunity to discuss the options and express their preferences.</p>
September 2004	<p>Richard Hollinshead invited to Residents group meeting.</p>
November 2004	<p>Small group of residents and officers visit Dunston Staithes Home Zone in Gateshead.</p>

	<p>4th Nov, grant application to Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) successful. Project awarded £121,000.00 to build on the street works funded by the LTP. The NRF allocation paid for the tree planting, shrub planting, street furniture and the artwork.</p> <p>29th and 30th, Art workshops arranged with the children of Central First School and Alexandra First School. Workshops open to all residents of the Home Zone, the evening of the 29th.</p>
January 2005	Andrew Small presented his ideas to the residents at their monthly committee meeting.
March 2005	Installation of pieces.
April 2005	Proposals for the section of Second Avenue between Hawthorn Road and the Salvation Army Hall drawn up.
June 2005	Street Opening Event - to celebrate the completion of the Phase 2 works.
July 2005	Consultation meetings ongoing.

Endnotes

- ¹ Richard Hollinshead, Public Art and Design Officer, pers. communication, July 2005.
- ² *Ibid*, 2005.
- ³ Richard Hollinshead, Public Art and Design Officer, pers. communication, July 2005.
- ⁴ Inspire both funds (both matched and full) and levers in funding from other sources for public art.
- ⁵ Newbiggin by the Sea is a mixed community, as half of the community was involved in coal mining and half were involved with the fishing industry.
- ⁶ Commodore David Futers, pers. communication, July 2005.
- ⁷ The Artist Newsletter is the primary bulletin board for artist opportunities in the United Kingdom.
- ⁸ Commodore David Futers, pers. communication, July 2005.
- ⁹ *Ibid*, 2005.
- ¹⁰ Commodore David Futers, pers. communication, July 2005.
- ¹¹ Other regeneration initiatives in the town include the Memorial Park, the Gateway and social and private housing developments.
- ¹² Associated with the renovations was the demolition of a run down public toilet.
- ¹³ Commodore David Futers, pers. communication, July 2005.
- ¹⁴ The CET was set up by Wansbeck CVS to support community projects.
- ¹⁵ Wansbeck CVS produces quarterly newsletters for the Hirst Community Home Zone and also produces one-off newsletters around specific events, such as consultation events or workshops.
- ¹⁶ Declan Baharini, pers. communication, 2005.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, 2005.
- ¹⁸ Declan Baharini, pers. communication, July 2005.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, 2005.
- ²⁰ One of NOF's funding objectives is to attract new people to the investment area.
- ²¹ This Assembly was not involved in the consultation for the public art as it was not affected by the art trail.
- ²² i.e. town entrance structures often implemented by the organisation, *Greening for Growth*.
- ²³ Susan Dungworth, pers. communication, August, 2005.
- ²⁴ BVBC are the administrative authority that control whether or not planning permission is granted for specific pieces of art along the trail.
- ²⁵ This is a policy which was drafted by the Public Art and Design Officer and which concerned issues, such as maintenance and health and safety, relating to public art.
- ²⁶ Ian Faulkner, pers. communication, August, 2005.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, 2005.
- ²⁸ This was set up in 2003 and is made up of BVBC Officers, the Arts and Leisure Trust, Northumberland Care Trust and the Public Art and Design Officer.
- ²⁹ Barry Crowther, pers. communication, August, 2005.
- ³⁰ Local councillor, pers. Communication, August 2005.
- ³² BVBC, 2003, Young People's Lifestyle Survey.
- ³³ Information by Design, 2005, Wansbeck Young People's Survey 2005, Wansbeck District Council, Bedlington.
- ³⁵ BVBC local councillor, pers. communication, August, 2005.
- ³⁶ BVBC local councillor, pers. communication, August, 2005.