



**CORSHAM TOWN COUNCIL
PUBLIC ART STRATEGY 2024-2028**

APPROVED – MAY 2024



Corsham Town Council - Public Art Strategy 2024-2028

Executive Summary

In 2020, the Town Council approved its first Public Art Strategy (2020-2024). The Strategy was created as a result of the aims and objectives of the Town Council's two Strategic Plans (2014-2018 and 2018-2022), and the Corsham Creative Strategy (2017-2022).

Since then, the Town Council has produced a new Strategic Plan (2022-2026) with a pledge to 'continue to enhance the Arts, events and culture in Corsham through our own projects and working with, and supporting, others'. A new Creative Corsham Strategy (2022-2027) was approved in March 2023, with an aim to build on the Town Council's 'desire to enrich people's lives using our vibrant creative ecosystem to support health and wellbeing, enhance learning and open up opportunities for everyone, as well as drawing people to the High Street, underpinning our visitor economies and supporting our creative industries.'

This new Public Art Strategy (2024-2028) aims to build on those objectives and continue to increase the number of public artworks in Corsham, along with the opportunities this offers artists, over the next five years.

The Strategy is informed by current national and local planning policies, new development opportunities for Corsham, and current good practice in commissioning arts in the public realm. It aims to ensure that the potential benefits of increased public art activity are maximised for Corsham and its population by:

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

When Corsham Town Council published its Creative Corsham Strategy 2022-2027 it was done so with an overall vision 'to help the artistic and cultural resources in our town to flourish, and to ensure that creativity and culture are a vital and dynamic element in enhancing life in Corsham for everyone'.

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

Public Art in Corsham

1. Background

Corsham has a strong, and historical, reputation for the Arts. The famous Bath Academy of Art was based in the town. The Academy was established by Lord Methuen – the artist Paul Aynshford - at Corsham Court, where he lived, in 1946 and provided higher education in specialist art and design, teacher training, performing arts and combined arts. The Academy then became Bath School of Art and Design, which is now part of Bath Spa University (BSU) and is based at its Sion Hill campus in the city. The University left Corsham Court in 1986

but returned in 2008. Their Corsham Court campus, having been BSU's centre for creative postgraduate programmes, is now home to the University's Research Support Office.

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

The Peacock Arts Trail, established in 2013, on a volunteer basis, by a group of local artists, aims to promote the Arts in Corsham and north-west Wiltshire. The Trail takes place every two years and is strongly supported by Corsham Town Council and other stakeholders. As well as Corsham, the Trail includes artists in Box, Yatton Keynell, Chippenham, Kington Langley and Holt. The Town Hall is a venue for the Trail, hosting artists and a youth art competition.

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

All three of Corsham Town Council's Strategic Plans since 2014 have highlighted the importance of culture and the Council's commitment to public art in the town.

This second Public Art Strategy aims to continue the work set out in those Strategic Plans and both Creative Corsham Strategy documents, and address progress on public art plans in the coming years.

2. Definition of Public Art

Public art is any media that has been planned and executed with the intention of being staged in the physical public domain, usually outside and accessible to all. Where public art is physical in nature, it must always be publicly visible. Corsham Town Council's Creative Corsham Strategy (2017-2022) describes it thus: ***Public art may be temporary or permanent in nature and, as part of an overall programme, consideration can be given to extend the definition of public art to include temporary events, festivals, activities or temporary installations.***

3. Neighbourhood Plan

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

Health and Wellbeing Key Objective HWKO14: Incorporate appropriate public art into new developments.

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

The Plan's Heritage section also states:

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

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

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

Corsham Neighbourhood Plan is currently (in 2024) being reviewed to ensure that it is still in line with national and local planning policy and to plan for the period to 2038 in line with Wiltshire Council's emerging Local Plan.

Since the Corsham Neighbourhood Plan was 'made' the Town Council has adopted a new Strategic Plan, has a Biodiversity Action Plan and declared a climate emergency, all factors that could have an influence on public art projects and commissions in the future.

4. Public Realm

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

Examples of public art within the public realm could include:

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

In 2015, Corsham Town Council began work on an ambitious Public Realm Strategy. While some elements have been developed and delivered (replacement paving in the High Street, for example), increased costs, particularly post-pandemic, have meant a review of others. The Town Council, though, still has a focus on the town centre, including parts of Newlands Road and Pickwick Road and encompassing pedestrian links into the town. The aim is to improve the visual appearance of the area, marking the presence of an historic, interesting High Street and encouraging people to use the town centre.

The Strategy also looks to make improvements at prominent public areas and gateways to the town. The Cross Keys project, which began in 2019, included new surfacing, planting, a drystone wall and piece of public art. Again, the impact of the pandemic, increased material costs and other factors meant that the original public art project had to be totally rethought and recommissioned. The 'Cotswold Sheep' artwork is due to be installed in the summer of 2024.

5. The Value of Public Art

All public art in Corsham should aim to:

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

Individual pieces of art might also:

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

6. Examples of Public Art in Corsham



Lionardo, by Caroline Rudge



Wiltshire Lion by Jonathan Sanders (permanent fixture) with 2020's Let's Dance gibbons by Duncan McKellar, part of a temporary joint project funded by the Town Council and Pound Arts



Flower Fence, Valley Road entrance to Springfield Rec, by Anya Beaumont



The Prayer, with its sculptor Iain Cotton, in the Community Garden at The Pound Arts Centre



Installation at Lacock Road Cemetery, by Caroline Rudge

Other examples of public art in the town include the murals in the Martingate Centre (by Rob Cowan and Phoebe Tonkin); a peacock mosaic above the Town Council's noticeboard in Martingate and the original quarrying trolley (renovated by the members of The Brunel Shed) at Springfield Campus, with two more trolleys due to be installed at Park Lane in 2024. There have been many temporary public art installations in the town, usually linked to The Pound's festivals or art exhibitions.

7. Priority Sites for Future Public Art

Clearly with an ambitious list of aspirations but finite resources, an ongoing programme of works is required, with a need for it to be regularly revised. Entrance points to the town centre, however, remain a priority for consideration and, to that end, Cross Keys on the A4 has still been a focus despite the issues since the original 'Peace Feathers' design was cancelled due to rising costs. The plan for Cross Keys now is to run a series of shorter-term displays, featuring both commissioned and loaned artworks, which will offer more opportunities for artists and also create ongoing interest at a major gateway to the town. The first piece to be installed under this new scheme is Jonathan Sanders' 'Cotswold Sheep', due to be installed in the summer of 2024.

At its November 2019 meeting, The Town Council's Community Services Committee was presented with a list of potential public art sites (*Appendix 1*) for discussion. At its subsequent meeting, in January 2020, the Committee was asked to choose its top three sites, which were i) Springfield Rec, ii) Katherine Park and iii) the Bradford Road/Triangle

(dependent on the proposed changes in road layout if the Gladman development went ahead).

- i) Artist Anya Beaumont was commissioned in 2020 to create a new fence and entranceway along the Valley Road-side of Springfield Recreation Area, part-funded via the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) arising from the Corsham Rise development in Potley. The project has been completed and installed – see *6. Examples of Public Art in Corsham*.
- ii) Katherine Park has yet to be considered as a public art site but with the Town Council taking on both play areas in 2023, there is potential for an installation to be considered.
- iii) Although the Gladman development did not go ahead, other proposals for the Bradford Road/Triangle site have been submitted, meaning that location is always subject to uncertainty when it comes to installing public artwork. The two quarry trolleys due to be installed at Park Lane in 2024 will go some way to having public art (although with a stronger heritage connection) in that area of Corsham.

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

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

Alongside these sites, the Potley Community Arts Project (PACT) was commissioned in the summer of 2022, using developer funding from Wiltshire Council. The aim of this project, run by artists Caroline Rudge and Rachel Heard, is to link the long-standing community of Potley with the new residents of Portland Rise via community engagement activities resulting in a physical public artwork in the area celebrating local wildlife (the agreed outcome following the community engagement). It is hoped this will be installed in summer/autumn 2024.

In a separate project in the Potley area, the storage shipping container used by The Brunel Shed is to be painted by graffiti artist Baz Hurlow, with support from Shed members and the local community.

8. Commissioning Process

Corsham Town Council's commissioning process is run via its Public Art Task Group, which is made up of Councillors (May 2024 – membership of four Town Councillors) using a three-tiered approach (*see Appendix 2*) depending on the scope of the project.

Small Art Commission – Initiatives that are lower cost and lower risk proceed without Task Group oversight, allowing projects to be delivered without delay. Examples: art associated with StoryTown activities or adding beautification to signage and street furniture. Creating a Small Commissions Brief is an objective of the Creative Corsham Strategy's Year 2 Action Plan.

Medium Arts Commission (under £10,000 but in a prominent location) – The Task Group is consulted on the initial concept and plans for the artwork. Examples: new graffiti art at Springfield Skate Park and the ornamental fencing at Lacock Road Cemetery.

Large Art Commission (£10,000 or over) – The Task Group is fully involved in the specification, shortlisting, selection of artist(s) and commissioning process. Large art projects would also be discussed by the Community Services Committee and involve relevant stakeholders such as Pound Arts and Bath Spa University. Examples: the Springfield/Valley Road Entrance and the Potley Community Art Project (PACT).

The Task Group might also consider when and how to pursue external sponsorship for art installations.

9. Large Art Commissioning Process

Corsham Town Council's commissioning process for Large (£10,000 or over) Public Artworks is as follows:

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

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

10. Current Resources

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

- The Community Services Officer (Arts) post – 18.5 hours per week at Corsham Town Council.
- Corsham Town Council earmarked reserve of nearly £23,000.
- The Pound Arts Centre – Pound Arts and Corsham Town Council have a Service Level Agreement which sees the Town Council give funding to The Pound on an annual basis, with certain conditions. Among many other contributions to the work of the Town Council, The Pound provides suitable entertainment and/or family activities to support the Christmas Lights Switch On and at least one other Corsham Town Council event (eg Taste of Corsham, Summer Fete, Street Fair) each year. In recent years, The Pound's offerings at events have also seen the inclusion of temporary public art and street theatre. The working relationship between both organisations is very strong.
- Pound Arts' Creative Director and Visual Arts Coordinator, both of whom have supported Corsham Town Council with professional expertise when selecting artists for design briefs.
- The Peacock Arts Trail team who are available as 'critical friends' and as a means of sending information to artists.
- A growing group of local artists and creative practitioners to call upon for advice and also use as advocates for the Town Council's projects. These include The Corsham Gallery's owners and artists, as well as the creative practitioners based at Lancefield Place in Pickwick.
- The Town Council's Community Engagement Strategy gives clear guidance on how best to engage with residents and local groups

11. Next Steps and Potential Future Public Art Projects

Potley Community Arts Project (PACT) 2024

Installation of completed PACT project in the Potley/Portland Rise area.

Painting of The Brunel Shed's shipping container.

Cross Keys 2024

Installation of the 'Cotswold Sheep' on the plinth at Cross Keys, followed by a series of sheep created from the original mould to be painted by local schools and youth groups.

Ongoing research into future commissions/loans for the site.

Priority Sites

Work on commissioning artwork for the Town Council's priority sites. Councillors and/or the Public Art Task Group may wish to revise this list more frequently.

Small Art Commission Brief

A template Small Art Commission Brief is to be created, which can then be used for smaller projects such as signage.

Peacock Arts Trail 2025

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

Ongoing

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

Ongoing

Inclusion of public art in Public Realm work.

Ongoing

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

Ongoing

Actively seek funding streams, sponsorship from local individuals, organisations and businesses, to support the Town Council's own funding.

Ongoing

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

Ongoing

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

In summary, the Town Council will continue to consider every opportunity for public art to be incorporated in its work within the parish, in order to meet both the Town Council's strategic aims and the aspirations of the Creative Corsham Strategy 'to help the artistic and cultural resources in our town to flourish, and to ensure that creativity and culture are a vital and dynamic element in enhancing life in Corsham for everyone'.

This Strategy should be read in conjunction with the Town Council's current Strategic Plan, the Creative Corsham Strategy and its current Action Plan; the Town Council's Community Engagement Strategy and Wiltshire Council's Cultural Strategy 2024-2030.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Priority Sites for Public Art Works for Consideration During 2020-2024.

Appendix 2: Public Art Commissioning Process (*September 2022*)

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