

Cabinet

4 August 2005

Public Art Strategy



Report of Patrick Conway, Director of Culture and Leisure

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide a progress note on Public Art developments with a particular focus on Aykley Heads.

Background

- 2 In August 2002, Cabinet agreed a Public Art strategy for Aykley Heads. This involved four activity strands for the long term development of the site:-

- A land use audit of the Aykley Heads site.
- Three artists with established international reputations to be invited to spend an extended period of time on site for the purpose of developing design proposals for a major public art initiative.
- Stimulating debate and offering individuals and groups the opportunity to engage with the process through an outreach and education programme which would be organised to document the process and raise public awareness.
- Two open air exhibitions at Aykley Heads showing examples of British sculpture with the intention of 'warming the site'.

This programme lasted over two years and provided a platform from which further work could be undertaken, including commissioning a major piece.

- 3 A two year budget of £55,000 was agreed for 03/04 and 04/05. This was augmented with funding from the Regional Arts Lottery Programme and the Arts Council, totally £63,050.

Progress

- 4 During the summers of 2003 and 2004 two programmes of temporary sculptures have been a feature at Aykley Heads. Arousing considerable critical acclaim, the pieces provoked a range of responses but the evaluation of each show demonstrated a high degree of public interest and support for the Council developing its work in public art.
- 5 Both programmes were accompanied by comprehensive education programmes involving nearly 40 local schools in total. A range of public discussions attracted wide ranging audiences.
- 6 Essentially, 2003 and 2004 were designed to 'warm the site', encourage debate and open up the possibility for either a sculpture park development, and/or a major commission.
- 7 The initial strategy sought to explore a major commission. In association with the Arts Council and Commissions North, two internationally recognised artists, Zadoc Ben David and Pal Svensson, have spent time researching and exploring the site, meeting with officers and the portfolio holder for Culture and Leisure. The third internationally recognised artist selected by the panel was unable to take part due to other commitments.
- 8 Though a proposal to build £75,000 into the core Culture and Leisure budget was unsuccessful, there nevertheless will be a third summer programme of public art on Aykley Heads. This is being linked to the biannual British Art Show, a showcase exhibition of the best in gallery art, which opens at the Baltic in September.
- 9 The Public Art Panel, chaired by the portfolio holder for Culture and Leisure, is now well established. Initially concerned with Aykley Heads, its remit was extended and agreed by Cabinet to deal with all public art matters involving the County Council. The recent RKL Report on public art in County Durham recognised the Panel provided the structural capacity to act as a focus for public art work in County Durham generally and not just initiatives involving the County Council.
- 10 Since 2002 there has been a steady growth of interest for public art throughout the county, particularly related to heritage and pieces contributing to community industry.
- 11 Public Art as a contributor to regeneration of an area in its broadest sense, continues to be recognised by key organisations including Regional Development Agencies. It is noteworthy the level of support from ONE North East that has been made available in recent years and how iconic pieces figure prominently in the marketing strategy for this region as regards inward investment.

Aykley Heads Major Commission

- 12 Discussions with Zadoc Ben David and Pal Svensson resulted in proposals from both artists. Internationally known, with major installations in North America, Europe and the Middle East, they have visited Durham, are attracted by the potential, and have presented suggestions to the Public Art Panel and leading Members.
- 13 An exhibition for Members is being arranged for the period 28 July-8 August, with staff from Culture and Leisure in attendance between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. each day.
- 14 At this stage, no firm decisions have been taken and during the summer consultations with a range of organisations are being scheduled. The proposals and drawings will form part of the British Art show.
- 15 During the next six months further work with the artists, the Arts Council and Commission North will take place.

Recommendation

- 16 Members are requested to note the information.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance

At this stage, views on the pieces are being invited. Financial implications will then be considered should the authority wish to proceed. Were that the case, external funding would be essential.

Staffing

N/A

Equality and Diversity

N/A

Accommodation

N/A

Crime and disorder

N/A

Sustainability

This forms part of further research following consultation.

Human rights

N/A

Localities

Pieces are envisaged to be sited on the Aykley Heads estate.

Young people

Continuing engagement will form part of the brief.

Consultation

At this stage, the County Council is consulting a wide range of organisations.

Health

Not at this stage.