

Project Profile – Workington Town Centre Public Realm

Client - Allerdale Borough Council

Value – Programme £2.7M

Services – Strategy Development, Consultation, Commissioning, Design Procurement, Project management, Engagement, PR.

Duration - March 2003 – June 2008



Project Aims

To effect a sea change in the image of Workington from a poorly served industrial town to an attractive town centre and retail hub capable of diverting people from going to Carlisle or Newcastle. The Public Art and Public Realm programme was an enhancement of the retail developers proposal and a means of creating an engaging and different experience for the people of the town.

Objectives

The plan was to develop a strategy and programme of works to enhance the existing proposals for a new shopping centre and raise the quality threshold. To determine where and how we should intervene to improve the quality of the pedestrian environment for local people and how we should involve them in that process. The strategy developed

- A temporary lead-in programme to introduce people to the potential
- Seminars with artists and architects to create familiarity and build trust
- A plan to create a series of linked artist-designed spaces, each with its own identity and focussed on different sections of the community.
- A financial and procurement strategy and a methodology for introducing a more democratic process to capital projects in the area.

Outcomes

- A Commissioning Plan for the investment of £2.7m in art-based improvements and a process to raise levels of public realm ambition and standards of art and design procurement in the Borough.
- Commissioned artworks at key sites including the Lookout, an interactive video clock; a column of rails from the now closed steelworks; Coastline, a public space based around the coastal landscape of West Cumbria, a 1200 Sq Metre glass artwork, an inflated, illuminated canopy with 3D sound and a host of sculptures and artists' street furniture.
- A winter lights programme

Project Overview

This project began as an outline strategy to include the Harbour but rapidly focused on the Town Centre as the key area of maximum footfall. We developed a plan of movement and space usage in the town and this enabled us to agree the areas of primary investment with the Client. Each space has a different focus and addresses the needs of different members of the community.

At the Hub we commissioned a 'floating' inflated canopy with integrated lighting and this involved working closely with sound artist Martyn Ware, formerly of Heaven 17. The aim was to create a performance area with plug and play sound system for local bands and performers. Martyn Ware produced a sophisticated 3D sound system that recreates the effects of sound moving through space and around the listener. By collaborating with local groups, Martyn also produced a programme of specially recorded sound to populate the space during the day.

Andy Plant designed a family and children focussed space away from any traffic and with a Camera Obscura based video clock and discreet sound system describing issues and stories from the area. Andy worked with sound artist Matt Pound. A specially commissioned bench houses the sound system and it allows people to lean back and listen without disturbing the peace of others.

In a space formerly dominated by cars, Edward Allington has created a tranquil sitting area with a contemporary sculptural planter and a new paving scheme. Here people now have a place to rest and recuperate as they shop. The space is on the edge of the retail area so also acts as an welcoming area from the residential area beyond.

As one turns off the A66 into Workington, Simon Hitchens has created a formal 'front room' space to welcome people to the town. Themed on the natural characteristics of the landscape, it incorporates massive granite seats, lightworks and a reproduction of the coastal outline of West Cumbria in the granite paving: hence its title: Coastline.

Alex Beleschenko has designed over 1200 square metres of decorative glass to provide canopies throughout the shopping core. Using imagery based around local industry and the landscape, this is one of the largest glass commissions in the UK.

Edward Allington has also created a new space themed on the industrial and social history of the town and incorporating a landmark column made from some of the last steel railway lines manufactured at the Corus Plant in Workington. In addition we commissioned elements of site specific street furniture and hardware including gates, car park grilles, seats, bus stops and signage, engaged a writer in residence and a winter lights programme.

