

**Margate Arts Creativity Heritage Conference:
Culture-led Placemaking in Margate and a
future vision for Creative Thanet**

1st February 2017

Introduction

After years of challenge, Margate has become the inspiration for seaside resorts around the country, not only for its flagship place-making projects but also for the vibrancy of its fast-growing cultural sector. This event celebrates the learning from almost 10 years of culture-led placemaking in Margate, with a focus on the legacy of the innovative Margate Arts Creativity Heritage partnership programme, and with a view to the future of economic and cultural growth across Thanet.

Drawing on the findings of a survey of the creative industries, it examines the impact of public investment to date in the culture/creative sector, using the town's rich heritage and historic built environment as inspiration and resource. Critical to the success of this creative sector approach has been the response of artists and cultural organisations – we hear their experiences first hand. There is a great deal to learn from looking back at what has been achieved in Margate, at the same time as considering what more can be achieved in Thanet by exploring the creative intersection between arts and heritage. The following provides a brief summary of the speakers from this event and audience feedback.

Thanet's Economic Growth

Rob Kenyon, Director of Community Services, Thanet District Council

Rob Kenyon analyses the success of Thanet's growth over recent years, focussing on rapidly expanding sectors such as culture, tourism and high-tech agriculture. The inherent qualities and existing assets around Margate are highlighted, such as its wealth of cultural venues, award winning beaches and proximity to London. The talk focuses on how these factors have worked together to contribute to Margate's successes over recent years.

Session 1: The MACH Story

The morning session celebrates the success of Margate and the role of creativity and heritage in its development over recent years:

The timeless appeal and relevance of our seaside resorts

Dr Andy Brown, Planning and Conservation Director, Historic England South East

Dr Andy Brown looks at the history of Margate and how our relationship with British seaside resorts over time has helped shape the town. This highlights how Margate has always been a place of 'rule breaking' and innovation, and sets the scene for the role of Historic England in Margate's more recent development. This role focussed on encouraging partnerships with a range of organisations to tackle the regeneration from a grass roots level, with particular focus on the relationship between heritage and the creative sector. Historic England has helped facilitate the matching of the demand for low cost studio space with the significant amounts of historic infrastructure in need of restoration. They have also been involved in setting up Heritage Action Zones. This has led to regeneration that does not feel imposed upon communities, but allows freedom for non-conformity and creative expression. The measure of Margate's success will be if it manages to retain this sense for the next 20 years.

MACH Projects powered by Pecha Kucha

Five speakers contribute five minute presentations to the Pecha Kucha:

Blushing Pavilion presented by Sam Causer

Sam Causer discusses how the awarding of a HOME residency grant for artists led to the creation of the Blushing Pavilion - a series of events including a temporary intervention at a shelter in Palm Bay, Cliftonville. These events invited the public in, celebrating the landscape of Margate and its position as a place for human enjoyment and naughtiness. A broad programme was undertaken, with event ranging from exhibitions, residencies, drag shows and kite making.

Anna Symes Bridges y Puentes, presented by Anna Symes

Anna Symes reviews her involvement in theatre and dance events around Margate. Bridges y Puentes is a traveling production celebrating migration and diversity. It reaches out to the local community and brings a diverse range of performances and audiences together.

CRATE, presented by Nick Dermott

Nick Dermot shows a proposal for the development of artists' studio spaces on a former industrial site in the centre of Margate. This focuses on the historic development of the high street and the nature of industrial uses in the town.

Margate's Stepped Revetment presented by Chris Tipping

Chris Tipping discusses the impact of the recent construction of the large-scale steps/terraces linking Margate beach to Marine Drive. This focused on the improved relationship between the town and the beach, and how a valuable new community space has been created.

Resort Studios / Recreate presented by Dan Chilcott

Dan Chilcott talks about the setting up of Resort Studios in a historic building in Margate. This involved the collaboration of a group of artist and young creatives in a community led regeneration with the help of a grant from MACH. Resort Studios have now become a focal point in the town, building a creative hub and hosting regular public events.

Changing perceptions and realities through the arts

Hedley Swain, Area Director, South East Arts Council England

Hedley Swain discusses the role of culture in the regeneration of Margate and the Arts Council's role in this. He discusses why Margate specifically has seen such dramatic advancement (relative to comparable towns), highlighting areas such as the Arts Council's investment at grass roots level, collaboration with the English Heritage Great Places scheme, input from Kent County Council, the role of the Turner Contemporary, and the town's willingness to take a long-term view. He celebrates the success of Margate, but raises the importance of continuing this in a more uncertain future with reduced investment from public bodies.

The Blossoming of the creative Industries across Thanet: findings of the creative sector audit

Sophie Jeffrey, MACH Project Manager, 2010-15

Sophie Jeffrey looks at the growth of the creative sector in Margate through the analysis of data gathered from surveys undertaken between 2008 to 2016. This period has seen rapid expansion of the sector, with 84% growth, involving significant numbers of businesses moving into the area and bringing empty buildings back into use. Information gathered includes indications of strong levels of satisfaction for those living and working in Margate and a strong voluntary sector, but highlights how low wages remain a problem.

Session 2: Developing Creative Margate

The afternoon session leads on from the discussions of how Margate became the town it is today, and looks forward to the future:

Big Ideas for Culture-led Placemaking and Regeneration

Dr Tom Fleming, Director, Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy

Tom Fleming discusses his role in producing the Cultural Strategy for Margate in 2008 and how this should inform future development. He looks back at how the depressed economy created opportunity for innovation and the role of art and culture in the regeneration of the town. Challenges for the future include the pressures generated by success and the decreasing affordability for many people, maintaining innovation, and future political uncertainties. In order for Margate to continue as a success story it must open up the cultural agenda and create spaces for interaction for all members of the community. It must continue to be a place of innovation and experimentation, while considering how culture can act as a catalyst for wider economic regeneration.

Alison Brooks, Founder and Principal, Alison Brooks Architects

Alison Brooks considers the big ideas and ideals for culture-led placemaking, referencing the importance of authenticity, contextualism and authorship in achieving good design. She demonstrates these principles through the new Quaterhouse Performing Arts centre in Folkestone that Alison Brooks Architects have recently designed. Commissioned through competition, the approach to this project involved consideration of the wider public realm around the site and analysis of the historic infrastructure of the town. The resulting schemes takes cues from the form and massing of the surroundings while making a contemporary insertion into the historic streetscape with an innovative cladding system. It provides a flexible 220 seat auditorium and events space with ancillary uses on a tight budget. She highlights the importance of the ideals of 'beauty, generosity and diversity' in this process, and the significance of visionary, proactive planning.

Future Vision for Creative Thanet Charrette

In this session the audience splits off into five groups to discuss and feedback on four key questions regarding the future of Margate:

Question 1: As we have heard the Creative sector in Thanet is predominantly made up from small and micro businesses and sole traders, who are members of diverse networks. How might we work together to strengthen the sector's voice and ensure that opportunities are promoted to all? How can we network the networks?

Summary of Responses:

- More 'hub' spaces are required to encourage informal interaction. Create and open up existing civic spaces in which people gather and communicate. This should include public open spaces as well as buildings
- Address issues of the continuity of funding for existing networks and venues
- Consider employing an individual to act as an enabler (recognising that the highly active voluntary sector in Margate is already stretched) with the aim to broaden connections between informal existing networks
- Focus on communities from all around Thanet, not solely Margate
- The Local Authority should set up an online platform, accessible to the wider community as well as artists
- Opportunities to continue the good work undertaken by MACH should be explored

Question 2: Greater community inclusion is a priority for the sector. What could you (as individuals, organisations and networks) do differently to make it a reality and what benefit would it bring to the community?

Summary of Responses:

- Should begin by talking to the wider community - identify who we should talk to and better understand their desires
- Existing networks should be identified - businesses not yet represented should be recognised and promoted
- More programming of events and festivals, leading on from the success of the recent Margate Festival
- Focus on addressing existing barriers, such as language and the inclusion of young people

Question 3: What are the most effective ways to promote local talent and independent businesses? Who is best able / placed to lead on each?

Summary of Responses:

- An organisation with funding and resources dedicated to these issues could be set up

- A listing of creative businesses and their accomplishments could be collated and publicised
- A mentoring system for successful local role models to share their experiences could be set up
- Placements and residencies within the industrial sector can encourage communication and collaboration, opportunities for this should be identified and developed
- Decision making should be bottom up - recognise the risk of 'over-branding' in this kind of exercise, ensuring Margate maintains its image as a place of creativity and independence

Question 4: Partnership working is important for the sector but they tend to be with other cultural organisations or education providers. Limited partnerships with industry were identified and almost no digital collaborations. What opportunities are there to broaden this to other industries?

Summary of Responses:

- The proposed delivery of 17,000 homes creates opportunities to provide funding streams through Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments
- Opportunities for commissioning artists to collaborate in future development projects
- The recent GEEK gaming festival at Dreamland involved successful collaboration with local hotel and food venues. This could act as a model for future festivals and events with other sectors
- The arrival into Margate for many is from the train station, however, the condition of the station, surrounding public realm, and local businesses and amenity provision are currently of generally poor quality. This should be addressed, potentially involving partnership with the Local Authority, train companies, developers, local businesses and community networks

Closing Remarks

Victoria Pomery OBE, Director, Turner Contemporary

Victoria Pomery was appointed Director of Turner Contemporary in 2002 and has been a leading figure in the regeneration of Margate. She delivers the closing speech, considering the exciting changes that have come to Margate over recent years and the town's role in the future:

The great success of Margate is recognised, with a series of changes big and small over recent years that do not combine into a model that could be rolled out in other areas, but are uniquely specific to Margate. She highlights the specific roles of Kent County Council and MACH in this journey and the importance of maintaining momentum into the future. As the creative industries are likely to play an increasing role in the future of the British economy, places such as Margate are of particular importance and must be nurtured. While the local economy is fragile at present, there is huge potential for growth in the future.

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