

Confluence Stage 1 Report

Introduction

This report documents the 15 week intensive research and development project undertaken by the Confluence partnership between April and July 2014. It describes what we did, what was uncovered in the process and how this has informed our stage 2 plans. It begins with the launch and summarises each of the elements that made up the 15 week programme and ends with some conclusions and the lessons learned.

The stage 1 project was broadly concerned with answering 3 questions that would help in informing a stage 2 application to the Ideas: People: Places programme, namely:

- Is the river the right context and focus for regeneration in the town?
- What level of buy in and community support can we expect?
- Will the community and decision makers engage with the idea of the arts as the driver in the process of re-imagining and regenerating the town ?



Image 1: The Castle from the Old Bridge

Launching and communicating about the partnership

Working with a graphic designer, the partnership rapidly developed an identity that could be applied to all of our communications, enabling us to launch the project across a range of platforms, within two weeks of the start date.

A facebook presence was established, <https://www.facebook.com/haverfordwestconfluence> with links to well supported organisations in the town, such as Honey harfat, as well as to the existing social networking presences of each of the partners in Confluence. This gave posts and promotional material about the programme an immediate reach of upwards of 1000 people.

A linked wordpress site was set up to provide a more structured shop window for the project and a space to gather together ideas and inspirational practice in the fields of Art and Architecture www.confluencwest.org.uk

The Confluence partnership was officially launched at the Garth Youth and Community Centre with a presentation to invited stakeholders, including:

- Pembrokeshire College
- Haverfordwest Civic Society
- Pembrokeshire County Council Regeneration Unit
- Haverfordwest Town Museum
- Pembrokeshire Communities First
- Artists Pembrokeshire

Over subsequent weeks presentations were also made to:

- The 4C's (Town Council, County Council, Pembrokeshire College, Chamber of Trade)
- Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
- Pembrokeshire Archive
- PLANED Board
- Royal Society of Architects in Wales (RSAW) South Wales Branch AGM

A briefing session with the Haverfordwest reporter on the local weekly paper, The Western Telegraph, ensured a good understanding of our aims, which resulted in comprehensive coverage of the partnership and its work, with six sympathetic and accurate articles being published in 15 weeks.

Central to our communications strategy was a planned short term lease on an empty shop unit in a great town centre location in the Riverside Shopping Centre designed to provide a focal point for the project as well as a venue to host many of the activities. Between setting up the project and being given the go-ahead from the Arts Council of Wales, the Riverside Shopping Centre went into liquidation and although we continued to try to negotiate a meanwhile lease, due to the legal complexities of communications with the administrators, this proved impossible to achieve within the

tight timescale required. (These difficulties have subsequently been overcome and a unit will be available later in the year)



Image 2: Hands on workshop in the Riverside Market Unit Haverfordwest

Fortunately through our partnership with Pembrokeshire County Council and the support that the project had engendered across departments, we were given access to a couple of Units within the Riverside Market (a building whose future is also currently under review). The use of these units enabled us to promote and run some elements of our programme of targeted participatory workshops and events, whilst others were relocated to alternative community venues.

Discourses on the river

Our research began with a series of guided walks focussing on the town's relationship with the River Cleddau, both physically and in terms of the activities and events that take place at different times of the day and week. The walks created opportunities for the exchange of ideas and the sharing of information in a series of informal conversations. They also began the process of building core support for the project and developing momentum for the programme of workshops and activities that followed.

The 3 initial walks that made up *Discourses on the river* were themed:

- *Promenade*: leisure pursuits and activities
- *Liminal*: evening becoming night-time (on the edge of perception).
- *Built*: the relationship between activities such as work and commerce, and the town's built environment.



Image 3: Discourses on the river - Built

In addition to publicising the walks on our facebook page and blog, we promoted the walks on the ground , at events including Transition Haverfordwest `s Green fayre and in the Farmer`s Market, held weekly in the Riverside shopping centre. As a result they were well attended with many local organisations and societies represented. A wide demographic included: Town and County Councillors; Haverfordwest Civic Society; the Chamber of Trade; individuals associated with the Confluence partnership as well as `just curious` individuals.

The walks gave us access to a rich vein of information and a means of starting to engage people who live, work, learn, play and visit Haverfordwest, in an exchange of ideas about how we `see` our town and how it could be `re-imagined` for the future. Participants recorded their thoughts during and after each of the walks on postcards. These comments have been collated and archived as research material for future reference in Stage 2.

Ideas ranged from the grand and visionary to simple improvements that would be easy to implement but they were all imaginative.

'A green wall by the bus station'

'Flood the flood plain, break the infrastructural stranglehold currently choking Haverfordwest. Give the town identity as the place with a castle overlooking a massive inland lake/ watersport/ marina/ fishing centre. The barrage for this to provide renewable power.'

'pleasant places to sit'

'Band-stand for good buskers!'

'Have boats on the river...Get rid of riverside parking.. Have more greenery right through the town'.

'Create riverside walks to increase footfall'

'Find out ownership of buildings.. rethink the riverside Market and area alongside'.

An additional walk `Civic` was added to the programme and undertaken in partnership with Haverfordwest Civic Society, who through active participation by their membership have demonstrated strong support for the project.

Our research uncovered some shared concerns about Haverfordwest, in particular, the loss of quality retail outlets, which have been replaced with empty shops and shop types that have changed the character and feel of the town. New businesses are typically: discount stores; pawnbrokers; betting and charity shops.

A consensus of opinion was that changing lifestyles, lack of vision and poor strategic decisions are stifling the town's health and vitality. Issues include:

- high rates and changes in shopping habits due to the internet
- new out of town retail developments,
- loss of civic and commercial institutions,
- no obvious cohesive plan for the future of the town centre.
- lack of investment in existing cultural amenities and assets
- loss of independents including a number of well-known, family-run businesses.

These are perhaps common to many towns in Wales, but it was felt that in Haverfordwest in particular, this change has crept in by stealth, with little or nothing being done to arrest the trend, or to generate alternatives. Haverfordwest is seen as being at a very low-ebb in its fortunes, yet we encountered a desire to change and improve what the town has to offer. Local people hold the town in great affection, despite the current lack of direction and clearly expressed the need to see positive change.



Image 4: Youthful exuberance and super skills; a skatepark competition event in May, organised by Haverfordwest Skatepark Association

Two walks took in the new outdoor skatepark in Picton playing fields, upheld by many as the best example of a successful local initiative. Since its completion and opening at the beginning of the year, the skatepark has proved a dramatic success, drawing in young skaters and cyclists from all over the county and beyond. As a result, we decided to run a workshop for skaters, providing an opportunity for them to explore how the success of the skatepark could be built on through the provision of further facilities.

A research by-product of the walks has been a much clearer understanding of the local context and the physical landscape, discovering that the Cleddau runs through an area of quite outstanding natural beauty, one that can be easily reached on foot, within a very short distance of the centre.

However developments on the river's flood plain along the east bank all dating from the 1970's and early 80's have obliterated the former Bridge meadow, and obscured routes to nearby meadows in the upper reach, and the estuarine landscape in the lowest reach, downstream.



**Image 5 : River Cleddau at Bridge Meadow
'the river runs through an area of outstanding natural beauty'**

Another discovery was the strategically-located empty property hidden behind the former Post Office. This is one of a number of centrally-located buildings and sites along the river which are currently vacant or under-used, which offer opportunities for new uses.

A number of other buildings in strategic locations identified along the river offer similar potential for new uses. These include the council-owned Riverside Market, which is in terminal decline and, with the resiting of existing market stalls in a more appropriate location, could offer a town centre site of great potential to trial new models of community ownership and a range of alternative uses such as: low cost hostel accommodation; a boat shed; community managed tourist information centre etc



Image 6: Disused sorting office behind the old Post office

The vision behind Creative Folkestone (one of the initiatives that we learnt more about at the *Vital Places* seminar) has inspired us to think about ways of redeveloping underused buildings in the town as meanwhile spaces for low-cost artists studios and exhibition spaces as well as for creative industry startups.



Image 7: Riverside Market

The walks have given us a clear picture of the town's disconnection with the River and the currently under-used assets situated along it. In Stage 2 we plan to

- map the ground and research into the ownership and building use in more detail,
- investigate the potential for under-used buildings and land to be brought back into creative use,
- find ways for hidden landscapes and natural assets to be made much more accessible and better-connected to the town centre.

Arts Council of Wales seminar

The ACW seminar for the successful stage 1 applicants provided the first real opportunity for our partnership to spend a 'team building' day together, travelling by train to Cardiff, attending the seminar and having a chance to reflect on and digest everything we had heard and seen on the return journey.

The diversity of the speakers and the scope of their respective practice gave us much food for thought, with the timing being perfect in terms both of informing the delivery of our stage 1 programme as well as feeding in to the development of our stage 2 application.

in particular, the breadth of social engagement through the Arts presented by the speakers; artists and architects working in real locations and communities, was insightful and inspiring.



Image 8: The Roker Pods, an Art Gene project discussed by Stuart Bastik at the ACW seminar

Talking shop - a programme of participatory workshops and events

Pop up riverside museum

A key aim of Confluence is to change perceptions about Haverfordwest, as a first step in the process of 're-imagining' the town. The 'Riverside Museum' focused on aspects of the town's past - through memories and historical insights. Our pair of market units were converted into a pop-up museum with displays and artefacts provided from Pembrokeshire County Council's Archive, and a seminar room to host a lecture on the history of Haverfordwest which was given by Simon Hancock, author and curator of Haverfordwest museum.

Preparation for the workshop involved meeting with Claire Orr, the Curator of the Archive. In our opening discussions we discovered Claire's desire for a virtual history digital app project - downloadable to smartphones and activated at locations in Haverfordwest on a walking tour. This could inform our own proposals and brief for a small project or Artist's commission in stage 2. This idea was revisited when we experienced an interactive digital audio project *Missorts*, on the trip to Bristol.

Haverfordwest Museum is situated in the former Governor's house at the Castle but the Museum's location and future is now uncertain, following the re-location of the Archive from the Old Gaol to a new purpose-built facility, and subsequent plans to sell off the Old Gaol and surrounding area to a private developer.



Image 9: Underused riverside buildings framing the castle view

In the process of 're-imagining Haverfordwest', Confluence has scope for engaging with the Museum as an under-used cultural asset and exploring what might be a range of options for it's future.

Skaters Sketch-up

The skatepark provides a new and exciting focus for youth, and has put Haverfordwest on the map amongst the skateboarding fraternity. The facility is of a very high standard and draws young people from all over Pembrokeshire, with events bringing visitors from around the UK. However, presently skaters have to walk into town to find amenities such as toilets, food outlets and places to sit under cover

The workshop provided an opportunity for young skaters to design their ideas for what they would like to see as additional facilities in the park. The shop unit was transformed into a design studio with Architects and Architectural technologists on hand to work with the participants using a range of media, including hand sketching on tracing overlays of plans, and translating these into a 3D CAD model of the park on a laptop computer.



Image 10: Technologist Rhodri working with two skaters in the Skaters' sketch-up studio

A group of younger participants worked on designing more skating features, such as jumps and ramps. Adults had other ideas such as one lady who wanted to start a cafe, called 'Skate til late' in a nearby pumping station- an idea captured on one of the more than 150 feedback postcards completed by participants in stage 1.

Alongside the skatepark is the The Picton Centre, a Community Centre managed by the Town Council, which has boarded up its verandah to prevent young people from sheltering there. The building is purpose-built and could, if properly managed, host a cafe franchise for the youngsters. This highlights some of the underlying issues. Generally though, it is recognised that the Skatepark is a great success and has brought a new influx of young people into Haverfordwest.

We want to connect with this positive initiative in Stage 2 and encourage new recreational uses and events along the river for people of all ages This will inform our commissioning and link in with a new programme of festivals in the town, including a river festival - one of the projects being promoted by the 4C's.



Image 11: Hands On workshop

Hands on

This pair of workshops took place in the Riverside market on consecutive afternoons during half term and catered for families with young children with the theme of becoming Architects for a day and making model buildings.

The sessions were run on a 'drop -in' basis which suited parents and carers with young children, during the half-term break. Adults and children, working side by side, produced model designs ranging from 'people pods' and sculptural planters, to a museum-cum-library 'Palace' . This was an opportunity to get around the table and try out an idea for the riverside from scratch, in a craft studio environment.

Midsummer Frolic

Our first walk began in 'Fortune's Frolic', a park situated on the lower reaches of the river. We returned to the Frolic on midsummer's eve in a procession led by musicians and accompanied by children and adults, to celebrate the solstice, take in the views and walk a mown Labyrinth laid down in the sward.

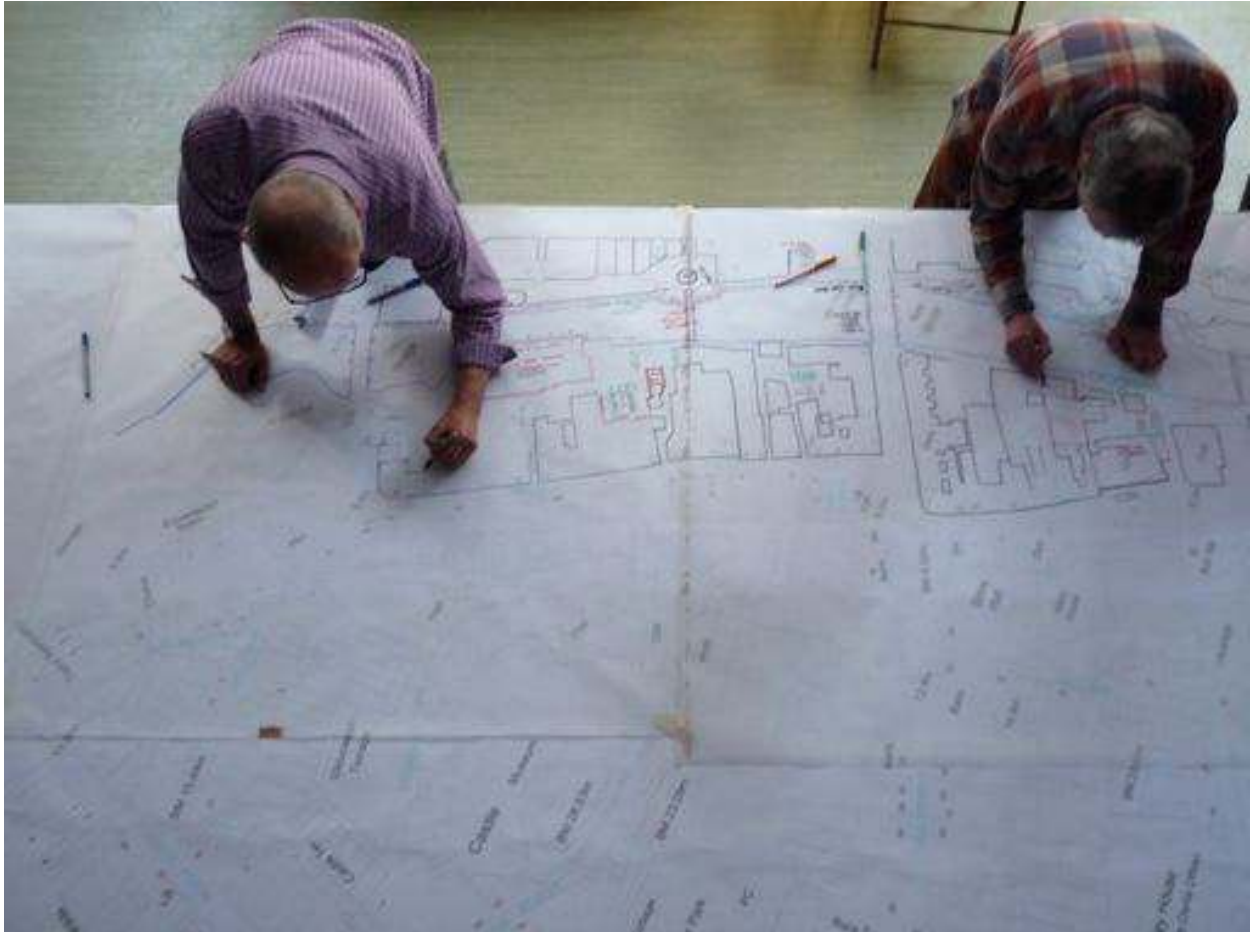


Image 12: Midsummer Frolic - Mapping the river

The procession to the park was preceded by mask-making, and 'mapping the river' workshops held alongside each other at the nearby Picton community Centre. Mask-making appealed to children and families, and was an integral part of the midsummer celebration as participants were invited to join the procession leading to the Frolic and a picnic by the river later on.

In 'Mapping the river' participants worked on tracing overlays, on a very large print of the riverside and town centre, and the upper and lower reaches at either end. The scale of this drawing is 1:200 which has the potential for a lot of detail, but equally needs a large room or space to lay it out. The map was laid out on the Hall stage, providing a perfect working height for working on the overlays.

This was the first opportunity to set down ideas on a large-scale map of the town. iDeA Architects, undertook to highlight some of the places and buildings identified by Confluence in the Stage 1

investigation, through the earlier walks and workshops. The 'Mapping' appealed to older participants and interested parents who engaged with us whilst the children were occupied with their masks.

The 'mapping' consisted of outlining in red, the sites and areas of interest (similar to a planning application) , then drawing initial ideas for, 'greening' , new public spaces , and writing down ideas for Artist-led projects and for re-using buildings along the river.

We will continue the process to map the town in phase 2. The mapping will consist of a series of themes to investigate and illustrate graphically: land use, building ownership, under-used public space, vacant buildings, walking and sustrans routes, archaeology, green space and hidden or inaccessible places. These will provide reference material for commissioned artists' and participants' involvement in stage 2, and help us to develop the creative direction of the programme. The shop unit is large enough to accommodate the map on a permanent layout table as part of the ongoing 'Town Lab' studio.

'Vital Places' seminar

The vital places seminar - an event for urban regeneration professionals and community leaders in Haverfordwest organised by Confluence, showcased the work of Dave Chetwyn, an inspirational urban planner, Fiona Boundy, curator of Artlands North Kent and Alastair Upton, Director of Creative Folkestone. **See Attachments C1 Seminar flyer English and C2 Seminar flyer Welsh**

The presentations demonstrated how creativity and vision can effect change, which in turn acts as a catalyst for urban regeneration. the seminar was well attended and a lively discussion, chaired by Jonathan Bevan of CREW (Centre for Regeneration Excellence Wales) ensued on the subject of how this might be applied to Haverfordwest.

The speaker's presentations were recorded on film, to be uploaded onto the internet. Delegate's thoughts on the seminar were captured through the writing of postcards.

- *Very inspirational event.*
Build on the success of the skateboard park and turn Picton playing Fields into a "family orientated" venue – link with the Frolic. There could be a bandstand; children's play area, café/toilets.
- *Fantastic day. Inspirational speakers and positive discussion. Really enjoyed it.*
- *Thanks all for the days events Really enjoyed and appreciated the three speakers' presentations. This whole project is really exciting, the potential is endless, but even to have got this far is really commendable....Great networking opportunity today too!*

Further feedback came via emails received after the event.

- *'It was great to see a mix of delegates ranging from LA Officers and Planners to artists and art organisations. Its rare that the two sectors come together for such events so I congratulate*

Confluence on getting everyone together. From small seeds acorns grow, and the presentations highlighted the transformative role the arts can have in terms of regeneration.'



Image 13: Studio Weave: Ecology of Colour–Dartford one of Artlands North Kent projects discussed by Fiona Boundy

The seminar was well attended and it's content recognised, and noticed further afield with responses from notable individuals as far away as Hong Kong, who have a vested interest in the town.

Go and see visit to Bristol 4 July

Our trip to Bristol was planned in partnership with Aldo Rinaldi – Senior Public Art Officer, City Design Group (Urban Design and Conservation Team) and aimed to provide a day of inspiration for a group of up to 20 people from Haverfordwest. The day was fully subscribed with representation from the core partnership being accompanied by a mixed group of participants including: town and county councillors; representatives of the chamber of commerce and the civic society and a group of artists and architects.



Image 14: Aldo Rinaldi, Bristol's Senior Public Art Officer discussing *Ballast seed garden* by Maria Thereza Alvez

Once in Bristol, the trip began with a visit by boat to Maria Thereza Alves' *Floating Ballast Seed Garden*, which is part of the wider *Seeds of change* project. The Haverfordwest delegation had no problems relating to the context of the work, through the obvious parallels with our town centre river and the project set the scene for a conversation that continued throughout the day on ways of reconnecting the town and its people to the river.

After a brief lunch, the group headed off to City Hall for an audience with the Mayor. George Ferguson, an architect and entrepreneur, is also Bristol's directly elected Mayor and is currently presiding over the city's preparations for becoming European Green Capital in 2015.

In conversation the Mayor reflected on his experiences and some interesting shared themes, and issues, on which he would like to improve:

- vehicular traffic control and reclaiming our civic space on an equal footing with motor cars
- championing the Arts as value for money, and recognising the transformative role they can have in times of austerity, with large-scale cuts in public services placed on the city council,
- Concerns over improving the demographic for health and longevity in neighbouring wards of the city, and recognising this as a social problem to address in the C21.

- leading change in urban renewal by example, such as his DIY re-development of a disused Tobacco warehouse bought for 200K, a lot then, said his bank- but really 'less than carpet', which became a successful urban mix of creative re-uses
- championing ventures that create a rich diversity; in his case starting a market and fighting for permission to do so from the city fathers (no one had done this since the granting of a mediaeval charter).
- strengthening local economy: the Bristol pound has been small in economic terms but hugely successful in promoting the city and values around a diverse local economy
- investment in young people -they are open to change

We discussed arts-led regeneration and one of our reasons for choosing Bristol for our visit; the potential for reopening historic links between Haverfordwest and Bristol, recognising that what was once maritime commerce is now a contemporary trade in ideas and people

We agreed we would stay in touch regarding developments in future.

Feedback from the postcards that we asked our delegates to write, immediately after this meeting focussed on the need for vision and leadership as well as a sense that we need to invest in children and young people as they stand to benefit most from a positive future.



**Image 15: *Follow me* by Jeppe Hein 2009
from the *Go and see* visit to Bristol**

We were then taken by Aldo on a circuitous walking tour around Bristol taking in a number of public art commissions of varying scales and ambition. Each of these in turn, whilst some were of a scale or cost greater than our immediate Stage 2 budget for Haverfordwest, provoked positive responses and engendered multiple discussions. We were able as a group to draw parallels between the works, and ways in which we might use them as inspiration for our stage 2 commissions.

We were inspired by the beauty of the Promenade development where ecology and naturalistic planting has softened and humanised a large-scale hi-rise housing scheme in a striking piece of urban design. Equally, we could see how the low to no- cost planting experiments we saw in parks and along the edges of the waterway could be applied to Haverfordwest, particularly in the concrete, canalised section of the town centre. The variety and success of the waterside walking and cycling routes along Bristol's floating harbour was another key finding, and an exemplar that has reinforced some of our early ideas for Haverfordwest.



**Image 16: *Promenade Sans Facon*
Bristol Harbourside**

A small contingent stayed in Bristol overnight and took in the sights of the city the next day, including the Carnival in St Paul. We also took the opportunity to visit Hamilton House, a former redundant office building in Stokescroft which has been re-purposed by 'Co-exist' a social enterprise and community interest company, and converted as a multi-functional and multi-use community centre.

Here was a lively example of a DIY collaborative and creative re-use springing from a grass-roots level,

working in partnership with the building's owners who now have offices on the top floor. We visited the cafe and terrace on the ground floor. A 'Map' in the entrance reception portrayed the six-storey accommodation graphically with mixed uses and occupant's names stencilled in locations on each floor: these include a gallery, cafe, Artist studios, community Arts space, commercial offices, conference suites, a bicycle project, a solar rooftop and beehives.

Seeing this collective enterprise inspired us to think of and draw parallels with under-used or empty buildings in Haverfordwest. They present opportunities for arts and community-led creative regeneration and would benefit from the positive changes we wish to see, resulting from the raising

of aspirations in Stage 2. Buildings with uncertain futures or awaiting new uses, perhaps through devolved collective ownership include:

- the Post Office
- the Riverside Market
- Ocky White's Department store
- the former Marychurch foundry
- the Shire Hall
- the former Western Telegraph printing works and offices (below Castle)
- the Library
- Old Quay and Riverside warehouses

Some are fine historic buildings while others are very ordinary, like Hamilton House. There are examples we have uncovered closer to home such as 'crowd-funded', community-owned projects that also apply.

The visit to 'go and see' exemplar projects in Bristol has not only inspired us: it has shown a representative group from Haverfordwest some direct benefits for resulting from the arts in urban regeneration, and what we can achieve if we maintain a sense of purpose and a clear vision.

Conclusions

Community support and buy in for the project

We have been surprised and encouraged by the way that the community has engaged with the project and the clear desire to see it succeed. With the additional walk organised in partnership with the Civic society, our *discourses on the river* programme engaged more than 80 people. *Talking shop* and the *Midsummer frolic* events provided hands on opportunities for a further 75 people, whilst the *Vital Places* seminar and *Go and see* visit to Bristol involved a further 46 and 20 people respectively.

Individuals who live, work, learn and play in Haverfordwest, as well as organisations from different sectors and of diverse scale and responsibilities are open to being inspired and willing to get involved in experimental processes and ways of working together to re-imagine the town.

Context and focus of the project

The choice of the riverside as the focus for Confluence is absolutely on target and has engendered support from across the community. The river and its immediate environs have a huge scope to make a real and lasting difference to people's perceptions of the town.

There are a plethora of empty and underused riverside buildings as well as public spaces that provide huge potential for the urban regeneration of the town. Our vision has been met with a strong public view that 'the time is right for Haverfordwest'.

Match funding for the project

The source and route that the £45,000 match funding will be made available through is ideal in the way that it will encourage the 4C's to have a stake in the success of the stage 2 programme. We are also well-placed to take advantage of the opportunities that will arise in the coming months within the new European programmes. Early in stage we will work with partners to develop expressions of interest for these programmes and are confident that this will enable us to exceed our initial programme target of £700,000, set in stage 1.

Artistic excellence

The trip to Bristol and examples of excellence from the Vital places seminar have inspired us to aim high in terms of the range and scope of what is possible in the context of arts and regeneration. The particular focus of our commissions will be contemporary socially engaged practice. Through a programme of seminars, exhibitions and go and see visits we aim to raise the bar on people's understanding of contemporary artistic practice and the ways in which it can inspire and drive urban regeneration.

Partnership

The tight timetable and ambitious programme, combined with the challenges of overcoming the unexpected has provided a good test of the ability of the partnership to work together. This has required creativity and a flexible approach, which acknowledges the different strengths and constraints for each of the partners.

We are encouraged that the core partnership has been equal to the challenge. We have delivered a very successful research and development programme which has answered our key questions, informed our second stage application and put down a strong foundation from which we can continue to engage the community and build support for the Confluence partnership and its stage 2 programme.