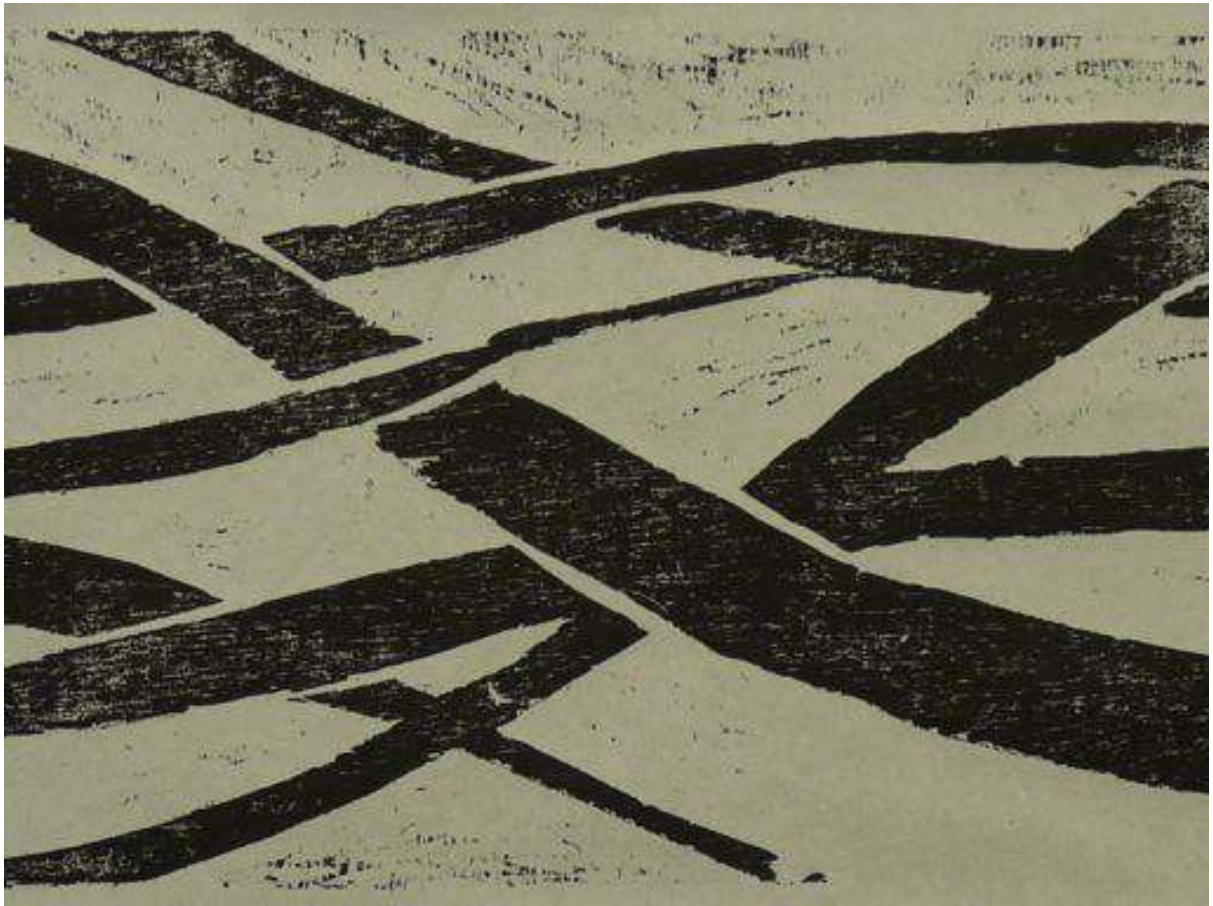# Making
the connections

Photograph 1: Detail from woodcut made by Jo Owen at *Printing from the river* workshop

How can Art play a part in regenerating our County Town?

Thursday 19 November 2015

Introduction

This report provides a summary of *Making the connections* – a one day event attended by 25 participants with a wide variety of personal and professional interests, which took place at the Lab in Haverfordwest on Thursday 19 November 2015.

The day began with a short introduction to Confluence followed by an inspirational presentation from John Kippin, artist, photographer and professor of Photography at Sunderland University.

The main aims of the day were:

- To explore how art can contribute to the regeneration of Haverfordwest
- To inform the role that the Confluence partnership and others can play over the next couple years

Photograph 2: Creating the Agenda

Participants were introduced to the concept and rules of *Open Space*, an independently facilitated process, which was used to identify what people

wanted to talk about and organise when, where and who would be responsible for each discussion.

The subjects that arose were grouped into themes, to form the agenda for the day:

- What's offered and what's needed
- Confluence and regeneration and co-ordination
- Art space and studios
- Maximising engagement and participation
- Role of art in regeneration
- What kind of art?
- How do we reverse perceptions... what are the blockers? What will stop us?
- Young people
- Legacy
- Town makeover and linking 'places'
- How can we undo the damage caused by cars and highway planning – but make the place more friendly and accessible to pedestrians?

The remainder of this report is drawn from the notes that were taken at each of the discussions.

Role of Confluence

Re-inventing, re-imagining.

Confluence is a kickstarter and a catalyst.... providing the laboratory for change.

It's a space that's conducive to talking and groups coming together.

The next stage should be in championing and mentoring... to make the connections and to ensure there will be something tangible as a legacy for Confluence.

It can also link through history to the work of William Owen and being the County Palatine.

Confluence should not create a bubble – it needs to demonstrate its relevance and not limit the possibilities.

Confluence can assist Haverfordwest to join up spaces, for example, in the form of a town park. Participants noted that the town has lost its identity, it has no heart... but that's also an opportunity.

Photograph 3: Group work

What does Haverfordwest want to be?

What can it be? What impact is needed for change? Is there a common vision or is the town still fragmented? But does fragmentation and diversity also bring an opportunity. Today should inform the vision and Confluence can be the focal point to draw people in and also reach out.

Art influences regeneration and so the responsibility to take this forward is a big one.

The economy is very important to Haverfordwest as a County town. Plugging the Leaks is a useful exercise that PLANED can facilitate. Low-level interest in this was linked to the need to spend. Participants made the link of this to the currently rapidly evolving emergence of a time-banking scheme in Pembrokeshire.

Arts Festival

An arts festival was proposed as something themed and unique to Haverfordwest, to tell the story of the town and its people, but also a way to showcase and celebrate local talent and to develop networks.

Ideas included:

- Separate workshops brought together in one event
- Lots of local talent in a range of media and materials
- Opportunity for a boutique environment, learning from the Narberth experience.
- One big day when Haverfordwest is a car free town.
- Stalls, entertainers
- 'Gap in the Market'
- Continuing the success of the 'River of lights'
- Involve pubs and parks to take arts to people and communities
- Use the St David's music festival as a model for success
- Building closer communities – people will need to work together and compromise
- Use the Shire Hall, Foley House and the Old Library – no shortage of venues
- Is it better to put everything into one week or spread it throughout the year with a few larger showcase events … creating a knock on effect?
- Support schools and enriching activities for children.
- Festival of Colour – powder and a run.
- One big collective effort that brings together people who are trying to 'make things happen' e.g. Riverside Gallery
- Story telling.
- Thematically based to align to water or bridges.

Do people make the place?

- Local democracy
- Local traders – individuals
- Sport – Ironman/diving skateboard competitions
- Festival – celebration by the people for the people
- Artistic community

Individuals can't do this alone – a critical mass is needed. We need to make the conversation bigger.

Photograph 4: Taking a break

Maximising engagement and participation

Some comments noted that 'everyone goes to Carmarthen'.

As an example of excellent practice, 'River of Lights' lantern walk … Haverfordwest became a different, human-scale, 'safe place'.

Confluence should:

- Avoid targeting specifics
- Maximise links with existing resources e.g. skatepark
- Make outputs attractive to get everybody to be involved
- Make the process accessible to all
- Hold events when workers and school children can come along, at a range of times – daytime, evening, and weekend
- Link with community groups and engagement events
- The LAB isn't an inclusive venue currently – we need to go out.Outreach events should be held where people are e.g. Tesco foyer, Castle Square.
- Use engagement activities suited to people and having fun e.g. instead of just Big Map, do plasticine models and involve children in fun ways whilst talking to parents.
- Encourage craftsmen to demonstrate what they do in 'pop-up' or medium term visible workspaces.
- Use the principles of public engagement developed and used by many organisations to evaluate the development of the project.
- Involve people in designing the projects more – get away from arts literate people / jargon.
- Really shout about what is happening e.g. this event, its implications for project development.
- Make use of existing skills and expertise in community/Pembrokeshire in engagement/facilitation e.g. PLANED
- Ensure that existing trusted people and organisations are used to broker interaction e.g. youth workers, skate association, Local Education Authority and schools.
- Achieve 'art for all' e.g. Eden, Heligan to ensure things created are accessible. Botanic Gardens got it wrong when they first opened. Had buckets hanging from fountain/washing line – really inaccessible at that time (like the 'Black Diamond' project which only engaged the art community)
- Capture feedback from the people as commissions develop and as confluence proceeds (not to 'tell' artists to change but to be aware of public view).
- LANDMARK – don't put all eggs in one basket as it won't appeal to all. Instead utilise a range of media, styles, artists etc to lead to a number of grouped pieces e.g. a trail.
- Vital that Confluence actually talks to/listens to/acts upon feedback from all sectors of the community and organisations who work with them.

Art linking places within town

We need to review access requirements for people and traffic sharing space. There are many opportunities to develop 'history' trails such as art commissions at points of interest with relevance to the location, encouraging pieces of street art. These could be linked to William Owen and be in the form of sculptures or interactive opportunities such as geocaching, culture beacons or platforms that read cards to record visits. They could include children's puzzle trails linked to sculptures.

There are opportunities to look at current footbridges to liven them up. We could identify locations for 'pocket parks' in 'hang out' locations. By making fun and humorous items and considering the above points, spaces can be made welcoming to all.

Around the river, there are spaces that could help 'green the town', to make better use of currently under-used green spaces, especially by improving accessibility.

How can a legacy be best supported?

A legacy was seen as important for the project. To create this a number of things are needed to happen:

- Show the value of participating
- Cultural shift in people and organisations
- Changing people
- Confidence to build on success – back the winners, 'Invest in the doers'
- Asset based approach
- Inspiring the next generation
- Integrated – links to other 'good stuff' – food festival, beer festival, civic week.
- Something tangible needs to emerge

Outcomes:

- The town is a destination not a refuge.
- Increased confidence in the town
- Increased investment in the town – money, time and ideas.
- Perhaps a linear park.

Photograph 5: Talking around the room

What is the current cultural offer and what is needed?

1. Existing choirs, flowers, yarn bombers. Many small groups and individuals but not so much 'focus; on place, or the role of art in a place.

2. Castle, Priory, Cinema, Picton Centre, Museum, Galleries, Skate Park, Choirs.

3. Community centre, heritage centre, small space as well as large: a strong identity for the town to make the most of its assets e.g. river, castle, priory. Ideas for development include some strong public arts, a higher quality gallery, cinema and better urban planning (bypass). We need to highlight the good things and the great artists we have already and showcase them. Innovative ideas include linking the centre of town to the castle via cable car.

4. For the people and community we need a focal point for the County and this should be the county town. There is a need to provide another reason to visit, other than purely shopping. A cultural quarter

How do we change perceptions?

Of Confluence – few people know about it.

Of Haverfordwest – 'it's dead'

The local press is reasonably well read. It is important to get a positive story in e.g. Western Telegraph every week e.g. 'inspirational story of the week'.

- Engage local press in this
- Build ongoing relationship with the press which is hard to do, especially to keep fresh
- Existing page on 'Haverfordwest' is dull and reactive.

Other ideas included:

- a nostalgia trip 'then and now',
- link to the Honey Harfat facebook group
- Stall at farmers market until they begin charging £20 per week
- Outreach activities (see public engagement sheet)
- Educate and raise awareness … what is art?

Resourcing

The following opportunities were identified:

- People of Haverfordwest
- Local Authority
- Trusts and funds
- ACW
- EU monies and Welsh Government
- Mixed economy - National Trust, National Parks, CADW, National museum, Nation Library.
- Social housing partnerships e.g. Arts and Minds Consortium
- Corporate Sponsorship e.g. Valero. Bear in mind any ethical dilemmas.
- Crowd funding and sourcing.
- Gift Aiding
- Ideas for Pembrokeshire currency
- Volunteering – resource in kind.
- Research Council e.g. in partnership with College or University
- Income generation and match funding.

What kind of art?

A quality landmark is needed. There is a need to grow a perception that people can be involved in making.   We want to surprise visitors with something unique and authentic.

- Where are the references to Haverfordwest's legacy of famous artists
- Study centre for art appreciation e.g. the Mackintosh Centre, Glasgow. A studios collective, which provides a way in, a clash of collaboration.
- Create a destination for contemporary culture and art.
- A cultural quarter.
- Bring grassroots to the surface and centre.
- Not necessarily an object – more about people. Involve schools in an art competition.
- Unique regeneration.
- Creating areas of civic pride. Create focal meeting points that provide a space to gather around or lean on.
- Take art to people e.g. art in gardens/art in pubs.
- Linking places through art and sculpture.
- Make our intentions clear. Art is the key to the future. By being bold we get more independent investment.
- Light project or interactive sound and light (Rafael Lozano-Hemmer)

Town makeover and linking 'places'

Important elements to consider include:

- Cycleways e.g. to Withybush
- Public transport e.g. trams
- Car sharing
- Electric transport, especially bikes.
- Car parking is important.
- Highways need consultation and education.
- High Street short cuts increase pollution.
- St Mary Street is a good example of pedestrianisation.
- Analyse the different behaviour and needs of visitors and locals.
- Think about the location of the Tourist Office.
- Have a car-free day with a skateboard run going down High Street.
- Re-examine the gateways for crossing major roads.

Arts space and studios

An informal process-based arts space should be created to provide opportunities including professional development .... A beating heart for West Wales.

How can we do this and what should it be?

- Identify and occupy a space
- A culture, a network, a concept or a physical space?
- A network of people
- A centre located in Haverfordwest
- A place to introduce people to art
- Develop a culture of art specific to Haverfordwest and surrounding area.
- Called... school/college.... Hot-house.
- A cultural identity as an organic process or a strategic entity.
- Contemporary art class, which explains what this can be.

Is it relevant to Haverfordwest to include the Welsh Language?

Confluence is about identity and so the project should celebrate dialect... Iaith Sir Benfro. Welsh language needs re-enforcement and there are connections to heritage, sense of place and identity through Pembrokeshire Welsh.

'Cysylltiadau thwng diwylliant Cymraeg a gwybodaeth tirlun' 'Connections between Welsh culture and landscape information'

Photograph 7: Taking notes

We are in Wales and not operating in a little bourgeois bubble – this is not colonisation or a corporate take over. How can the language not be relevant?We should celebrate the dialect and language differences across the Landsker line and do more to push our uniqueness.

Many Welsh speakers visit Haverfordwest as the County town. We should therefore include Haverfordwest culture and 'herstory' as well as Welsh culture and history.

'Engage one Welsh speaker in the project and it will expand exponentially.'

Conclusion

The day ended with a chance for participants to reflect on the day and identify anything they might wish to take responsibility for moving forward as a result of the day.

It was agreed that Confluence would prepare and disseminate a report and set up further opportunities for participants to work together to develop the ideas that had come out of the day.