



Maidstone Borough Council

Public Art Guidance

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This Public Art Guidance has been produced for Maidstone Borough Council officers and developers. It has a borough wide remit that looks at the commissioning of public art as part of a development or regeneration scheme.

Maidstone Borough Council is ambitious in its aspirations for the borough and its people and recognises that public art can contribute to, emphasis and enhance Maidstone's unique heritage, cultural and natural assets.

Public art has a significant role when creating distinctive places and helping to establish successful and vibrant communities. Public spaces provide the most appropriate setting for public art and can make us think about the places that we live. The incorporation of an artist within the process of designing the public realm means their contribution of creative thinking, interpreting the use, history or hidden meaning of a space can express the aspirations of the communities that use them or will be a part of its future.

Maidstone Borough Council advocates that artist involvement must be considered at the early stages of a development scheme. Artists' contributions can be meaningfully and sustainably integrated within the physical infrastructure and as importantly across the communities that will be a part of a development's future.

National Policy and Guidance

In the context of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), public art contributes to strong, vibrant communities through the creation of quality places and relating health, social and cultural well-being benefits.

Local Policy and guidance

Maidstone Borough Council's Local Plan supports public art through the Policy DM 1: Principles of good design, specifically:

- ii. Respond positively to and where possible enhance, the local, natural or historic character of the area. Particular regard will be paid to scale, height, materials, detailing, mass, bulk, articulation and site coverage - incorporating a high quality, modern design approach and making use of vernacular materials where appropriate;
- iii. Create high quality public realm and, where opportunities permit, provide improvements, particularly in town centre locations;
- vi. Provide a high quality design which responds to areas of heritage, townscape and landscape value or uplifts an area of poor environmental quality;

Planning considerations

In setting a strategic vision for public art, Maidstone Borough Council insist that developers should appoint public art expertise to oversee the involvement of artists with specific development sites.

The involvement of public art expertise and artists with a specific development site should include the development and implementation of a public art plan prior to the submission of a planning application. A public art plan should be submitted to the local planning authority for approval as part of the planning application, and should include details of: why and how artists have and will contribute to a specific development site; the costs of public art projects; the maintenance of public art projects; and the timescale and trigger points for the delivery of public art projects. On this basis Section 106 Planning Obligations can be used to secure the provision of public art on specific development sites and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), when introduced by Maidstone Borough Council, can be used to secure the provision of public art across the development of a place as a whole.

What is public art?

Public art is art that is site-specific and made for public spaces. It can be understood as a variety of art forms and approaches that engage with the sites and situations of the public realm. Although it need not always be within public spaces, the term refers to work that is accessible or available for the public to see.

Public Art involves the commissioning of artists and craftspeople to make new work, which can be permanent, temporary, internal and external, embedded or freestanding.

Public art includes work that is integrated into a scheme, through material or functional design which could range from bespoke street furniture, lighting, seating, wayfinding, boundaries and landscaping through to internal details of a building - its furniture, flooring, ceramics and textiles. It can also be freestanding sculpture, or temporary in nature such as performance, moving image and events.

Benefits of public art

Public art provides social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits that can be achieved by including public art in a scheme, these include:

- Contributing to local distinctiveness and a sense of place
- Engaging and interacting with the public
- Contributing to an attractive environment to live, work, invest or visit
- Creating a strong sense of local identity and community pride
- Encouraging people to value their surroundings
- Providing a focus and stimulus
- Health and well-being
- Targeted at specific age groups/family friendly focus

Examples of public art

- Embedded in public realm – paving, kerb detailing, street furniture, cladding, man hole covers
- Interior work
- Wayfinding
- Lighting
- Stand alone/ gateway features
- Landscaping/open spaces
- Event based activity/performance/moving image

Commission timeframes

A permanent art work will usually have a life span of 10 - 15 years. Maintenance will have to be factored into the commissioning process to allow the artwork to withstand the timeframe. A semi-permanent commission will usually have a life span of up to 5 years and could be in place whilst construction takes place, for instance as a hoarding around a development site. Temporary commissions usually have a life span of less than 5 years. Commissioning temporary interventions before development begins is a good way of animating a site before or during construction. Temporary commissions can include activity and events as part of community engagement and is a successful way of engaging with existing or new communities.

Community engagement

Key to any public art process is community engagement. Where applicable Maidstone Borough Council advocates that Public art can be a platform for engaging with communities both existing and future alongside the commissioning process. A sense of ownership, public access and contribution to content development can be harnessed through artist engagement.

Examples:

An artist led activity or an event allows the public to engage with the artist and find out about or to highlight the changes that will take place as part of the development.

Artists can animate a place before construction begins with temporary artworks. Examples can be the use of hoardings around a development site.

Themes

Artist research is integral to public art development and themes should be set within an artist brief that draw on the character of a place. Themes should also set the context for public events and engagement programmes.

The cultural and historic heritage of Maidstone should be utilised and inform the commission process.

Themes should include references to:

- Eminent people who have resided in the borough and have contributed to significant changes in the world (with an emphasis on women)
- Key events that have shaped history
- Industries that have thrived in the borough and contributed to different stages of Maidstone's development.

When to start the commissioning process

Maidstone Borough Council advocates that artist involvement must be a considered at the early stages of a development scheme. This should be included as part of any pre-application discussions with officers from the Council. Artists should be brought on as part of a team working collaboratively with other professionals in the project/design team where their work is integrated into the scheme as a whole. Public art should not be seen as an 'add-on' or as an afterthought. Please see guidance on commissioning artists for the public realm.

When considering the potential for Public Art works Maidstone Borough Council advise that an artistic advisor should be engaged as early as possible into the process. By exploring the commission potential at an early planning stage, appropriate Public art commissioning can be conceived, approved and managed as part of the development timeframe.

How to engage an artist

There are various ways to engage an artist.

Writing a clear precise artist brief will help to attract the right artist. An artist brief should include, length of commission, material required, artist fee and budget, any specific themes, background to the context of the commission, maintenance, insurance and decommissioning criteria. Where possible artist should be from Kent or the South East area.

Open Call – placing an advert on specialist art websites can attract the right artist. Slides or portfolios are submitted, with decision made on performance and quality of past and potential of work at interview. This can be a lengthy process and takes up a lot of management time but is a good way to discover artists based in Maidstone, Kent or the Southeast.

Limited call out – a number of artists are invited to respond directly to the brief in the form of a proposal. Artist are chosen on the strength of their work and approached to apply. This is a quicker process and more direct. Knowledge of artist work is vital when choosing this method. A decision is made on performance and quality of past and potential of work at interview.

Direct approach – An artist is approached directly through advice from specialist advisor. This is a quicker process and direct. Knowledge of the artist work and suitability for the project is vital when choosing this method.

Interviewing – When choosing artists for a commission it is recommended that interviewing will produce the right environment for an open and inclusive selection process.

Stakeholder – Involving others in the appointment of artists can be beneficial to the commission outcome. A steering group can for example be made up of members of the development team, local community representatives, council officers, and specialist art advisor. Selection panels should be properly briefed and clear guidance be given on their responsibilities and the extent of their influence.

Contracting

On appointment of an artist/s a contract should be drawn up that includes agreed fees, budgets and timetable, defects and maintenance regimes, insurance and decommissioning agreements. This mutually agreed contract should also include details on the moral rights of the artists, attribution and acknowledgment, copyright and reproduction rights.

Maintenance of art work

Maintenance requirements for any art work should be provided by the Artist and agreed with the Commissioner. A maintenance plan should include details on the type of care that the materials and design requires. Cleaning, wear of materials, specialist equipment or treatments such as anti vandalism requirements should be included. On completion of installation the maintenance and cleaning of the work falls under the responsibility of the commissioner, a budget should be set aside to cover the lifetime maintenance of the work.

Insurance

Through out the commission process the artist is required to have adequate insurance cover that includes public liability insurance which has appropriate cover against risk of loss or damage to the work during research and development, consultation, production and installation. On completion of installation the insurance of the artwork falls under the responsibility of the commissioner. This should be budgeted as part of the overall commission.

Decommissioning

The continued integrity with which an artwork has been commissioned can over time become compromised through changes in use, character or design of a site for which the artwork was commissioned. Physical deterioration of the artwork, costly repairs or damage beyond repair can also affect the work. If this cannot be resolved through restoration, removing the work maybe the best solution. Artist contracts should include decommissioning agreements should include criteria to be considered for decommissioning, detail life expectancy, review periods and maintenance agreement.

