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**Great Place Scheme**

**Pioneering Places East Kent: Folkestone**

Pioneering Places is part of the national Great Place Scheme, an ambitious project that will make East Kent an even better place to live, work and visit by exploring heritage, developing civic pride and connecting artists and communities. Four exemplar projects in Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone and Ramsgate are being led by local cultural organisations to influence policy makers, and encourage any and all of the residents themselves to bring in change and become great place-makers.

Supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England and the Heritage Lottery Fund, with Historic England and Artswork.

The aims of the programme are to:

• create exemplary places through connecting people, heritage and creativity;

• create models that impact on future planning development structures;

• pioneer, test and evaluate 4 distinct ways of developing great places, exploring and animating heritage to inspire artists and community;

• develop new models of community consultation; inspire active citizenship, create a meaningful legacy;

• unite arts, heritage, public sector, education organisations and the wider community to understand and influence placemaking

**Folkestone – Creative Foundation and partners**

**The place**

The project identified for Folkestone and Hythe District is the old gasworks site on Ship Street and Foord Road, Folkestone.

The site was in fact the area first developed in Folkestone when the railway arrived and turned the fishing village into a fashionable resort. The town's first villas were built here in the 1840s and this area would be very different now if the villas had not been demolished to make way for the gas works that provided the gas for the new developments in Folkestone’s west end.

While the west end of town went on to be the area for royalty and nobility to visit, the Foord Road area, has attracted less attention. Pioneering Places will allow its history to be investigated and the people's history to be revealed.

In 2017 it was fifty years since the gasworks were closed leaving an area of polluted land at the heart of this community. It lies there abandoned as a testament to the failure of the property market where polluted land drags down the value of property around it, evidenced by the majority of houses being worth under £125,000, which in turn makes the development of the site unattractive.

**The people**

The Creative Foundation has a learning and engagement department that is working with local schools on the project. Partnerships already exist with Council wellbeing teams and other partner organisations, and these too could be used to ensure the design of the site is rooted in its community and so together ensures a successful placemaking project.

The charity's festivals place a huge emphasis on co-curation, co-creation and co-production, working with individual citizens, community groups, arts organisations and with other government agencies, particularly in the field of health and wellbeing.

**Why it is needed**

Our project sits within Lower Super Output Areas within the lowest 20% on the Index of Multiple Deprivation for Kent. The nearest primary school is Christ Church CEP where 49.6% of its pupils are entitled to free school meals compared to 14.3% nationally. The local secondary school, Folkestone Academy, also has a high free school meal population, 40.4%.

Qualification levels are lower than the Shepway and Kent averages.

36.1% of households do not have access to a car or van for transport (20% in Kent) which makes it difficult for them to travel for work, leisure or educational opportunities.

**Arts, cultural, heritage assets**

The Creative Foundation became interested in the site when it was asked by the local residents’ association if the area could be included in the Folkestone Triennial so that attention could be drawn to the brown field site. As a result in 2014 the artist Jyll Bradley created the site specific sculpture, 'Green / Light', to considerable acclaim. The work remains for the moment at the Gasworks.

The project

Folkestone and Hythe District Council, mindful of the drag it places on the area, is negotiating the purchase of the land from the gas board and its partners. It will address the pollution and then develop it as a mixed use site, with private and public housing as well as self-build that will return some capital to the Council, allowing it to make an investment that will see no or little return within thirty years. Only an enlightened council could make this form of investment.

It would additionally massively enrich the scheme by bringing the heritage of the site to the fore and including it in people's engagement with the site and in the design of the scheme.

The local community, including children and young people in neighbourhood schools will collaborate with artists and architects to reimagine the future of the Gasworks site. Through the Artswork funded project nearby schools will research the history of the site to develop responses and ideas through workshops, enabling children to share their vision for the future of part of their town.

**Sustained partnerships**

This cultural led regeneration has formed part of the economic, community and cultural strategies for Folkestone and Hythe District Council and Kent County Council. This has led more recently to a partnership between the district and county councils along with the Creative Foundation in a Townscape Heritage Initiative with the Heritage Lottery Fund to improve the conservation area at the centre of the old town.

Pioneering Places sets out to develop stronger collaborative ties that show the value of culture and heritage in placemaking. The question raised is what role could culture play in helping the development of the site: could using artists and architects help address the failure of the market and so the blight on this community? The idea is that by working with the Creative Foundation's curator and his network of artists and architects who have either significant reputations, work with socially engaged practice, have specific artistic and design insights or are specialists in placemaking, the site could be transformed through its look, design, functionality and community engagement, while attention to the site brings with it people's energies, enthusiasms and potentially adds commercial value.

Pioneering Places will allow this partnership to turn from a conversation into a rich reality by supporting the investigation into the site, the design of the scheme, the engagement of the community and the commissioning of artworks. All of these will be accomplished by 2020 and presented at the fifth Folkestone Triennial later that year.

Partners in this project would include the new Folkestone Museum which opened in 2017, along with Canterbury Christ Church University who have already investigated much of the history of the town. University College London and their Architecture School will provide insight into urbanism and design.

**Embedding culture and heritage into local plans and strategies.**

Pioneering Places would provide an architect and artist to work with Folkestone Hythe District Council on the Master Plan for the site and surrounding area. The local people’s history investigation will inform the design team of the context of where they are working and provide community and schools engagement with the project. The outcome of the research phase of the project will be included in the new Folkestone Museum’s programme in June 2019. Artists will work with the community, the architects, master planners and future users of the site on works for the public realm in 2020.

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description generated with high confidence