

Environment & Assets Committee

Title:	Public Art Thame
Date:	15 July 2025
Contact Officer:	Becky Reid, Environmental Project Officer

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update on the Public Art Working Group, and present new Terms of Reference for approval.
2. To provide an updated version of the Public Art Strategy for approval.
3. To present 3 new Public Art Projects that will be further developed by the Public Arts Working Group.

Background

4. Thame was awarded Public Arts Funding through Section 106 agreements in light of new developments in the town. In November 2017, the then Town Centre Working Group formed a sub-Public Arts Working Group to write a Public Art strategy. The Strategy set out the definition of public art, its value, what needs to be done to ensure the s106 funding is spent appropriately and that the community is involved.
5. The strategy was approved at the Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Committee meeting on Tuesday 25 September 2018, giving the Working Group permission to progress projects proposed in Section 10 of the Strategy, within available funds to completion, in line with the Strategy.
6. The first project progressed was 'Art Leading Wayfinding', a town-wide wayfinding project that sought to raise awareness of Thame's Heritage as well as connecting all new estates into Thame by improving wayfinding throughout the town (including Lea Park)'.
7. In 2019, the project started with the commissioning of a Wayfinding report. Following this, an Artists Brief for the project was created and a competitive interview process resulted in the recruitment of Nicola Henshaw as a lead artist. The project evolved to identify 3 main routes, and Nicola led on 2 of 3 identified routes. She worked with the community in a variety of ways and went on to implement 'The Peculiar Pot' trail, followed by 'The Cavalier and Roundhead Route'.
8. There are some minor works needed to complete The Cavalier and Roundhead Route, following which a final report will be submitted to SODC Section 106 team to finish this project.
9. To date, £115,360 has been spent on this work.

Current situation

10. There still remains £103,471 left towards Public Art, with the following restrictions:
 - 10.1. £10,844 restricted to within Elms Park.
 - 10.2. £5,057 restricted to within Town Centre.

- 10.3. £60,858 towards 'wayfinding'. This was secured from the Christmas Hill development that falls within Great Haseley.
 - 10.4. The balance of £26,712: "towards Public Art in Thame".
11. To determine what the next steps are for Public Art in Thame, the Public Art Working Group was reconvened on Thursday 26th June. New members of the community were invited to join the group, through a call in the Newsletter and targeted invitations to those who work in the arts sectors and could bring their expertise to the group. Councillors were also asked to join the group, as the Councillor who had previously been part of the group had since stepped down. The Cllrs involved now are Cllr Catherine Jones, Cllr Linda Emery and Cllr David Dawson.
12. The focus of the meeting was
1. To review progress against the strategy to date,
 2. To update the role of the Public Art Working Group,
 3. To review the list of 'Priority projects', previously suggested in Section 10 of the strategy, to determine if these were still relevant
 4. To hear ideas about other suggested projects
 5. To agree the focus of the projects to be prioritised from 2025 – 2030.
13. Following the meeting, the Environmental Project Officer updated the Public Art Strategy to reflect decisions made in the meeting. This is attached at Appendix 'A' for approval of this committee.
14. Terms of Reference can be found within the Public Arts Strategy at Appendix A to include the relevant changes to the work of the PAWG.
15. Following the meeting, the Public Art Working Group identified the following priority projects:
1. Elms Park: a project to use the Oak from 2 trees that are soon to be removed from the park – one already being dead and one that is dying.
 2. Public Art in Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve: to help to better educate users of the Nature Reserve about the work going on there, and the wildlife and nature being supported.
 3. Wayfinding Route 3: it was determined that identifying and delivering on the final route proposed route was important, but that because the route would take in the Phoenix Trail and Elms Park, careful consideration needed to be taken in determining a theme that incorporated these successfully.

Next Steps

16. Following approval of the Public Art Strategy and the new PAWG Terms of Reference, the PAWG will start work on scoping out the projects and identifying the relevant Section 106 funding that can be used to achieve them. These will be brought to the next Environment & Assets committee for approval.

Recommendation:

- i) To approve the new Terms of Reference for the Public Art Working Group,*
- ii) To approve the updated Public Art Strategy,*
- iii) To note the 3 new Public Art Projects that will be further developed by the Public Arts Working Group during 2025-2030.*