

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

PUBLIC MEETING

CREATIVE WINCHESTER

7 March 2007

1. **Councillor Peter Rees: Chairman's Introduction**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting approximately 80 members of the public along with representatives of local groups and Councillors. The meeting was held in the John Stripe Theatre, University of Winchester and the Chairman thanked the University for making the facility available.

It was explained that the Panelists that had been invited to make presentations to the Forum were just some of creative sector that were based in Winchester.

2. **Presentation by Marilyn Michalowicz**
(Arts Development Officer, Winchester City Council)

Mrs Michalowicz gave the Forum a brief presentation on the City Council's Arts Strategy and the Arts Strategy is available from
<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/LeisureAndCulture/Arts/Strategy/>

In summary, she explained that the Strategy sought to increase the capacity of the creative industries in Winchester, increase the opportunities for people to get involved and to develop and support creative projects which enhance the built and natural environments.

She illustrated the wide range of arts that were included in the strategy and that 300 of these had come together to form Winchester's "Café Culture" that was used as a network to support local arts. In addition to these, she illustrated the wide range of creative industries based in Winchester

3. **Presentation by Professor Anthony Dean**
(Dean of the Faculty of Arts, University of Winchester)

Professor Dean gave the Forum a presentation which is appended to these minutes.

In summary, he explained that the Strategic priorities of the University included that it would "seek to contribute to the culture of the City" and that its vision statement was to "educate and advance knowledge and to serve the public good."

There were 800 students at the University studying the creative arts (in drama, performance arts, media, film and creative writing) but that very few graduates remain in Winchester after the completion of their courses.

Professor Dean also highlighted the University's facilities that helped creative Winchester and these included performance spaces, TV studios, auditoriums, a gallery and the new University Centre that would provide a large music venue and additional cinemas for the town. In addition to the provision of these facilities, the University also sponsored the Theatre Royal, the Hat Fair,

Art and Mind and Café Culture. This was in addition to their involvement in community arts events including the Student Film Festival, Winchester Writers Conference and Drama sessions at the Prison.

Professor Dean concluded his presentation by suggesting that there was a fantastic opportunity to further encourage creativity in Winchester through existing organisations working together and more strategically. The Arts, he explained, needed to energise and feed itself, before it could deliver the social and tourism benefits it often provided to the wider community.

4. **Presentation by Fi Burn**
Chief Executive, Theatre Royal Winchester

In summary, Ms Burn explained the varied programme of events held at the Theatre and that 25% were performances by amateur artists and 21 performances were by young people. The Theatre had welcomed 65,000 visitors during 2005/06 (a figure which excluded the performers and those attending conferences) and that the theatre was a very well used resource.

The Theatre also contributed to creative life outside its auditorium and whilst it had sought to maximise its income (it was now possible to be married on stage for example) it was still reliant on its sponsors to continue.

Like Professor Dean above, Ms Burn concluded that there was a great potential to further encourage creativity in Winchester; but that there was a lot already here of which the town should be proud.

5. **Presentation by Andrew Carnie**
(Winchester School of Art)

Mr Carnie's gave the Forum a presentation to the Forum.

In summary, he explained that the School of Art had a long tradition in the centre of Winchester. The School of Art was now part of Southampton University and provided courses in Fine Art; Textiles, Fashion and Film and a Graphic Arts Programme. The School had 1200 students and strong international links which drew in students (and their visiting parents) from around the world.

Mr Carney went on to present the Forum some of his own work which was based around images related to medical science.

In echoing the comments of the other speakers, Mr Carney commented on the opportunity for Winchester to retain some of its creative graduates but that this would require the continued support of Café Culture and a greater availability of studio space. However, he concluded by highlighting the potential for the existing facilities of the town's universities to be made more widely available and the town's compact nature, which would help generate and sustain creative industries.

6. **Presentation by Alice Kettle**
Textile Artist

Ms Kettle explained that she had been commissioned to produce a piece of textile art for the new Discovery Centre on Jewry Street. At 16.5 metres by 9 metres, the artwork would be largest of its kind in the world (larger than the Bayeaux Tapestry) and from its position in the Centre, would be visible from the street.

The size and complexity of the artwork had required Ms Kettle to leave her garden shed workshop and set up a studio in the Guildhall Gallery where members of the public were able to watch the embroidery take shape. The work had generated a great deal of interest from the public and the wider media to the extent that Ms Kettle felt that the work would be owned by the people of Winchester. The work had also required Ms Kettle to employ assistants for the first time in her professional career and she asked the Forum to consider future commissions that would enable the continuation of this work.

7. **Presentation by Jenny Muncaster**
The Colour Factory, Winchester

Ms Muncaster explained that the Colour Factory was established in 1994 and was now located in the Park Keepers Lodge near River Park Leisure Centre. The Colour Factory currently consisted of five resident, professional artists that specialised in, amongst things, jewellery, video and contemporary art.

The Colour Factory frequently worked with corporate clients as well as the local community and schools on art projects (which included converting a garden into a beach for schoolchildren and alternative team building days for local businesses). Ms Muncaster also explained the work the Factory did in producing the painted bollards in the town and that the Factory was open for members of the public to visit.

8. **Presentation by Rodney Graham**
Design Engine Architects

Design Engine Architects were established in 2000 and operated offices in London and Warsaw although their headquarters remained in Winchester

Mr Graham explained that Design Engine Architects had designed the John Stripe Theatre, University of Winchester and he went on to illustrate the company's design for the British Embassy in Yemen.

He commented on the "underground" network of commercial, creative industries that there based in Winchester which included Peagreen and Helium 3.

Mr Graham discussed the potential of the Silverhill development to utilise roof spaces as public areas and to provide accommodation for proposed English Centre. He compared Silverhill with the WhiteFriars Shopping Centre Development at Canterbury and hoped that Winchester would create a better development. Mr Graham also suggested that there should be some sort of permanent mark to commemorate the Winchester Year of Sculpture.

9. **Presentation by Sian Thomas**
Winchester Hat Fair

Ms Sian Thomas gave the Forum a short presentation on the Hat Fair. She explained that the Hat Fair had been running for 33 years and was one of the top five street festivals in the country. In summary, she welcomed the support the Hat Fair received from Winchester and highlighted the benefits a vibrant artist community has for the wider community and for the local economy.

10. **QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

During the question and answer session which followed the presentations, the following issues were discussed:

- The creativity of those that worked in the sciences and information technologies businesses based in and around Winchester.
- That more should be done to encourage classical music in the town. However, whilst the Forum noted the concerts organised by the Winchester Festival and others, it was suggested that Winchester was in some way constrained by its proximity to cultural events held at Southampton, Basingstoke and London.
- That more funding should be made available and best practice sought from other areas to encourage and sustain local arts events and artists' studios. The Forum noted that there were few ex-industrial buildings in Winchester that might be made available to artists.
- That space should be provided in the Woolstaplers Hall for the proposed English Centre, as part of the Silverhill redevelopment.
- A recent graduate of Winchester who spoke commented on the opportunities and guidance that had been made available to him and that Winchester should celebrate what it had already.
- A representative of the City of Winchester Trust that spoke explained that it was running its own architectural competition and a representative of the Hyde 900 organisation explained that the Group was undertaking an audit of creative Winchester.

11. **CONCLUSION**

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution to the debate and invited everyone to visit the temporary exhibitions in the Theatre that had been prepared for the Forum.

The meeting commenced at 7.05pm and concluded at 9.05pm

Chairman