Submission to Arts Council England’s Creative People and Places Fund

from the South East Northumberland Consortium

Saturday Night at the Club

Oliver Kilbourn, 1940
Vision

Our vision is inspired by the story of the Ashington Group of Pitmen Painters, made world famous by playwright Lee Hall, champion for our project.

Theirs is a story of ordinary people who, like so many living here today, found it impossible to access or appreciate art because of geography and circumstance. Yet, by leading the process themselves, engaging the support of professional artists and following a mantra of ‘learning by doing’ they achieved exceptional things.

Our vision is to create long-term change in levels of arts participation, driven by the creativity and ambition of the people living here, and having a demonstrable effect on the well-being of local people and levels of social energy and activism within communities.

It makes a virtue of our lack of professional arts infrastructure. It opens up opportunities for everyone to access and participate in great art at places and in ways that are relevant to them.

It is based on robust research and a sound understanding of the distinct nature of the communities of South East Northumberland, the current arts ecosystem and the role of the voluntary and semi-professional arts sector.

We will create a network of non-traditional venues in which to make and experience work such as shops, GP surgeries, libraries and sports centres.

There will be interventions by carefully-chosen high quality artists and organisations from near and far working alongside existing groups and within communities to produce exceptional work.

There will be high profile mass participation events that will live long in the memory and small-scale, but equally excellent, experiences within communities. We will take audiences on an artistic journey which opens up new opportunities.

As the Pitmen Painters discovered, art has the power to change lives in very meaningful ways and people will see those changes in their own lives.
Activity Plan

Arts Council England’s Creative People and Places initiative has come about at exactly the right time for South East Northumberland.

The area, consisting of Blyth Valley and Wansbeck districts, has little or no professional arts infrastructure and low levels of engagement in the traditional arts offering. Yet, its communities suffer many disadvantages and are very much in need of the life-changing power of the arts experienced by the Ashington Group of Pitmen Painters 80 years ago.

A new consortium of organisations has come together in South East Northumberland combining expertise in arts, community engagement, heritage, health, learning and skills

Working together with the local community, we have created a vision to increase participation in arts over the next ten years and an activity plan which improves lives by harnessing the creativity and ambition of the people living here.

Background

South East Northumberland is an area that has received little or no benefit from the cultural renaissance that much of north east England has enjoyed over the last 10 years. It has no Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations or Major Museum Partners based within it and currently generates very few Grants for the Arts applications (less than 2% of ACE’s spending in Northumberland comes to the South East). Unsurprisingly therefore, the current levels of arts participation are very low.

The area is made up of a number of small to medium sized towns, each with a distinct identity and history. These include:

- Ashington (population 27,000) - Once the largest pit village in Europe and home to the Ashington Group of Pitmen Painters and Woodhorn.
- Blyth (population 35,000) – Traditionally an important port and ship-building town and now a centre for environmental technologies and sustainable energy.
- Newbiggin (population 7,000) – A Victorian seaside resort and fishing village with a thriving voluntary arts community and the recently opened Maritime Centre.
- Cramlington (population 40,000) – A 1960s ‘new town’.
- Bedlington (population 15,000) – A significant population cluster but with little or no arts activity taking place.
- Seaton Valley (several villages with a combined population 15,000) – home to the National Trust’s most recent acquisition, Seaton Delaval Hall.
- A number of other small villages - Choppington, Stakeford, Guide Post, Ellington, Lynemouth, Linton and Cambois.
The industrial decline that followed the demise of the coal mining industry was swift and devastating. Worklessness is currently at 12% of the working age population with youth unemployment a particular problem. The communities are not very mobile and travel little outside of their immediate geographic area meaning that very few people experience the high quality cultural offer on Tyneside.

There are large numbers of people who lack basic skills and numbers taking up opportunities to go into further and higher education are lower than in other similar communities around the UK. The percentage of 16-18 yr olds in Blyth who are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET) is 13.2% against a countywide average of 7%.

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of life in South East Northumberland is the poor health that people experience. Levels of child and adult obesity are way above the national average, as are levels of teenage pregnancy, heart disease and diabetes. Life expectancy is 10 years lower than in West Northumberland.

Young people have a particularly hard time in South East Northumberland with rates of unemployment, substance and alcohol misuse, offending and teenage pregnancy much higher than the national average.

However, there are also a number of positive factors.

The area is defined by its history, its natural environment and the character of its people. The success of Woodhorn, the mining museum, contemporary gallery spaces and archive centre just outside of Ashington, is testament to the pride that local people have in their heritage. It reflects their desire to take part in high quality cultural experiences that are relevant to them and have genuinely grown out of the community. For this reason, museum visits in the area are higher than the national average and provide a real strength to build on.

Woodhorn has established itself as a major cultural organisation within the region and is seen nationally as a leader in engaging people (particularly young people) with their heritage.

Other heritage-led initiatives such as Newbiggin Maritime Centre and the National Trust’s Seaton Delaval Hall have breathed new life into the cultural offer of the area and provide new venues for work. There is a concentration of voluntary and commercial arts activity around Newbiggin and Seaton Valley and we know that approximately 80% of the current arts provision throughout South East Northumberland is self-sustaining.

The area is well served by libraries with 15 in South East Northumberland and a recent strategic refocusing by Northumberland County Council putting them at the heart of communities. As the recent Henley Review points out, 'Library Services are already embedded into their local communities and often link
communities, schools and cultural organisations. People, who do not otherwise connect with cultural organisations, trust them; and they tend not to be seen as being elitist.’ To encourage this, the Council has just entered into a new ground-breaking partnership with Woodhorn who will programme arts and heritage activity in libraries across Northumberland in 2012.

Although few of the major regional NPOs work regularly in South East Northumberland there have been some really successful pieces of work done by Helix Arts, November Club, The Forge and Equal Arts who are all based in the wider north east region.

From 1st April 2012 Queen’s Hall Arts has taken on a strategic role for Arts Development across Northumberland. It brings a wealth of expertise in delivering excellence in arts and, in the South East, builds on work delivered by Blyth Valley Arts and Leisure in recent years.

The Current State of the Arts in South East Northumberland

The South East Northumberland Arts Development Study, conducted by arts and communities consultant Sara Robinson, took place over 18 months and involved consultation with over 70 arts organisations working in the area and members of the local community, strategic bodies and regional NPOs.

Funded by Arts Council England and led by Queens Hall Arts with support from Northumberland County Council, it provides a comprehensive audit of current activity and a well thought out strategy to achieve sustainable improvement in arts participation.

The Study, published in March 2012, gives us a robust audit and thorough understanding of the current arts offering in South East Northumberland. It also creates a clear strategic approach to increasing arts participation based on consultation with the current primarily voluntary arts organisations and members of the local community.

It was underpinned by a major piece of research conducted by Audiences North East on cultural engagement across Northumberland (June 2011). This research identified that 73% of respondents living in South East Northumberland would like to engage more in arts and cultural events but the main barriers to engagement were cost, lack of time, transport and significantly lack of high quality arts provision within the local area.

This seemingly latent desire from within the community was further backed up by Northumberland County Council’s recent consultation on the proposed new Ashington Leisure and Community Facility. Aside from sports, the most popular activities requested within the new centre were arts related, with a particular focus on performance and participation.

It is clear that there are a triumvirate of problems causing low engagement. The current arts provision is too often not appropriate to the area or sub-
standard in comparison to that elsewhere, the audience has not been engaged enough in arts activity to date to want to participate and the artistic experience is being delivered in venues that are often not fit for purpose.

Many other factors contribute to a lack of engagement in the arts - poverty, poor educational attainment, ill health, poor housing and transport, all exacerbate a general sense of disenfranchisement and social isolation.

Those least able to engage are those whose benefit is likely to be greatest if supported to do so. Additional support to engage is needed for socio economically deprived populations, particularly those who are additionally marginalised because of learning disability, mental health problems, ethnicity, unemployment, poor physical health, dementia, and social isolation.

Increased participation in the arts for these groups will be key to improvement of the population’s wellbeing in South East Northumberland.

The Study gives an excellent foundation on which to develop this work but Creative People and Places offers the potential to transform the current picture. It will increase the speed of implementation, raise the scale of ambition and extend the reach of our work.

We want to create long-term change in levels of arts participation and impact on people’s lives we have listened to the key messages coming out of the consultation on the South East Northumberland Study:

- Recognising that South East Northumberland is not one coherent place but a series of small towns each with their own identity; therefore some projects and facilities will need to be roving,
- Avoid ‘parachuting in’ stop-start initiatives and instead develop an ongoing, long-term and tenacious approach.
- Instigate progression routes, and stronger links with the creative industries, apprenticeships and employment routes.
- Respect current provision, respond to demand as well as supply, and avoid delineations between high and low culture – ‘It should be an offer that respects where people are at, recognises what they want, listens and draws them in, but builds aspirations and widens possibilities simultaneously.’
- Make the work bespoke and appropriate to the area (don’t apply rural or urban models from elsewhere).
- Engage people in activity with tangible results (exhibitions, performances, products, showcases etc) to demonstrate value beyond the process.
- Focus on art forms currently underrepresented or with strong potential for growth including writing, theatre, digital art and folk music.
- Connect with the history of the area but do not be constrained or defined by it and help visualise a future which does not cling to what was.

In shaping the vision for this application we brought together a range of people and organisations to revisit the South East Northumberland Arts
Development Study and the potential offered by Creative People and Places to transform our scale of ambition in the short term and set us on a path to a long term sustainable improvement in arts participation.

The Vision

Our vision is inspired by the story of the Ashington Group of Pitmen Painters and puts at its heart the idea of communities themselves working alongside artists and arts organisations to commission and create work.

Our vision is to create a long-term change in the levels of arts participation and to see a demonstrable and measurable change in the well-being of local people and the levels of social energy and activism within communities.

In achieving this ten-year vision we will focus on three main strands of activity – artists, audiences and spaces in which to create or experience art.

The activity will comprise:

Artists

- Interventions by high quality professional artists working alongside existing local voluntary and professional organisations to create great art, provide memorable experiences and build capacity. These artists will be drawn from commercial and popular strands as well as from the subsidised sector – developing progression routes but also redefining what we mean by ‘great art’.
- Profile raising, co-ordination and leadership to create a sustainable and vibrant sector over the long term.

Audiences

- Recognising the distinct nature of the communities of South East Northumberland and the need to take audiences on an artistic journey. This journey will improve their ability to access and participate in excellent art, develop skills, find routes for progression, and help them articulate their own aspirations and demands.
- Addressing the challenges that exist within the lives of people in the area, particularly around health, learning and skills and how we can help them through art.
- Creating a robust research and evaluation framework enabling us to capture the impacts of the project on people’s lives to build evidence which will enable long term sustainability in activity.

Spaces

- Taking artistic experiences to where people are. Creating a network of non-traditional spaces for work to be made and presented in, for example, shops, libraries, GP surgeries, museums and sports centres.
Transforming these spaces into places where high quality art can take place through technical and customer care support services.

Creating pockets of excellence which join up to create a high quality cultural offer across the area.

The Artistic Journey

When artist and Ashington Group tutor Robert Lyon first worked in South East Northumberland in the 1930s he was asked by the group to teach them the subject of ‘art appreciation’. After an unpromising start he soon realised that the real way for these skilled men to learn how to understand and appreciate art was to engage them in its creation.

The story of the Ashington Group therefore was really one of understanding the craft of creating great art as much as it was about releasing creativity (a process that inevitably followed). It was also a story of a group of men who wanted to learn and improve and progress in their craft. They were not driven by financial gain but wanted to see some benefit in their own lives.

Although many years have passed, those of us currently working in South East Northumberland recognise the need for a similar approach to working alongside local people and together define what ‘great art’ means to them and answers the question “What is in it for me to get involved?”. It is very clear that people have not engaged with the conventional offer that has been made in the past and that a radically different approach is needed.

This will mean engaging in new and different art forms drawn from popular culture including film, fashion and TV as well as capitalising on the strong heritage interest that exists. In addition, our ambitions are to push the boundaries and we see our role as exposing people to more challenging art forms and subject matters. In this way we will empower people to make their own choices about what constitutes ‘great art’.

The Consortium

The development of the consortium has been a very exciting and rewarding process already. It is the first time we have all worked together in this way creating a much stronger force for arts activity in South East Northumberland than ever before.

We have brought together a wide ranging group of partners all keen to play a role in delivering the vision. They include many of the existing voluntary and semi-professional arts organisations within South East Northumberland as well as artists and organisations from across the UK and internationally.

They also include a huge range of community partners and organisations working in health, social housing, education, adult care, development trusts and numerous other voluntary sector partners. The energy and ambition
created in the many discussions about our plans has been incredible and the
desire of high profile artists to come and work in the area is very heartening.

The core consortium members are Woodhorn, Queen’s Hall Arts,
Northumberland College, NHS North of Tyne, Northumberland County
Council and Connect4Change representing the Voluntary Sector Alliance.

Individually and collectively the members of the consortium have an excellent
understanding of and experience in delivering high quality art and processes. We have worked with artists including Sean Henry at Newbiggin, The Art and
Architecture Programme at Kielder, Spencer Tunick in NewcastleGateshead and many more.

The Consortium is led by Woodhorn Charitable Trust which runs four
museums in Northumberland and the Northumberland Archives and delivers
heritage, arts and cultural education and outreach work with people
throughout Northumberland. The Trust’s main site is Woodhorn in Ashington
which attracts an average of 100,000 visitors each year. It has a reputation
for putting on large blockbuster exhibitions drawn from popular culture. It is
now a major cultural organisation and yet retains a great sense of ownership
by the local community.

This is evidenced by the high levels of usage by local people. Woodhorn is
renowned for taking an arts-led and contemporary approach to its role as a
museum as well as very high quality participation and engagement work with
people within the local community. This includes an award winning young
people’s project which we have used to help ensure that the voices of local
young people have been heard in this bid.

On a practical level, Woodhorn is a large organisation with the skills,
experience and resources to manage the implementation of a project of this
scale and has in place the robust governance and management procedures
needed.

Woodhorn currently works with many artists and partners to bring high quality
work to the region.

Queen’s Hall Arts (QHA) is the strategic lead body for Arts Development
across Northumberland, a role endorsed and supported by Arts Council
England and Northumberland County Council. It has a long track record of
delivering excellence in both artistic content and participation through its
operations at the arts centre in Hexham and across West Northumberland. In
recent years it has developed mobile cinema, small-scale touring and youth
dance development across the county and is the lead body for the
Northumberland Strategic Arts Forum (chaired by QHA Artistic Director, Geof
Keys).

QHA has experience in commissioning, co-producing and directly producing
work across a range of art forms. It provides both leadership and support
taking in artistic direction, technical services, marketing and arts development.
Additionally it has fundraising and building development experience, having delivered three major capital projects over the last 10 years (on time and on budget).

**Northumberland College** is the further education provider for the county with its main campus in Ashington. The College has recently undergone a major refocusing of its activity to position itself as a hub for activity and learning within its community.

It embraces the vision of the recent Independent Commission on Colleges and their Communities (November 2011) to become a “dynamic nucleus” at the heart of their community, promoting a shared agenda of activities which both fulfil their central role of providing learning and skills training to young people and adults, but also reach out into their communities, catalysing a whole range of further activities.

The college is also a major presence in the lives of many young people and older learners within South East Northumberland with over 4,000 people each year directly engaging in its curriculum. It has a well respected art and design course with a strong focus on fashion having worked with Wayne Hemingway, Scott Henshall and Paul Shriek over recent years.

The college has just signed a memorandum of understanding with Chinese IT Company Huawei which offers huge potential to create a wider cultural partnership. Huawei, one of the largest IT companies in the world, is supplying state of the art IT equipment to the college in the only relationship of its kind in the UK. The company and the college are also keen to build links via IT and cultural partnerships between South East Northumberland and China.

The College is willing to dedicate a brand new mobile learning facility to the project equipped with 15 laptops.

**NHS North of Tyne** have recently assigned a Public Health Specialist to Northumberland to lead on Mental Health Promotion and suicide prevention. This specialist has experience of developing and commissioning a social prescribing pilot, designed to increase participation in the arts and local activity in North Tyneside.

Local evaluation has provided an early indication of reduced attendance in primary care and increased wellbeing scores (WEMWBS). An external evaluation is about to be commissioned from Sunderland University and the findings of this could inform a commissioned service, to develop an Arts on Prescription hub for South East Northumberland. The service will be commissioned based on guidance in Social Prescribing for Mental Health, a Guide to Commissioning and Delivery (Lynne Friedli, 2009), and NHS Confederation Briefing Oct 2011 – From Illness to Wellness.

**Northumberland County Council** has strong ambitions for and is strengthening its commitment to supporting cultural initiatives and innovation.
that promote excellence and participation. This commitment remains despite its challenging funding circumstances as it knows culture changes lives and makes them better through encouraging well-being, health and learning and skills. It also knows that great art leads to economic opportunities. This is critical for Northumberland’s future – stimulating economic growth and investment and creating more jobs is what the Council wants to achieve for local people.

Its commitment to culture is reflected in the funding provided for a range of organisations such as Woodhorn and Queen’s Hall Arts and through supporting mass participation programmes such as those taking place during 2012/13 around the Olympics, Jubilee and Lindisfarne Gospels and the delivery of a high quality arts and heritage programme across its libraries in the same year. Excellence and participation are at the heart of these arrangements, as is bringing people together to celebrate the distinctiveness of the area and learn new skills in the process, whether this be reading and storytelling, performing or researching local histories.

The Council will utilise all of its infrastructure, from youth workers to librarians to street cleaners to its award winning social media team, to support the delivery of this bid and make it a success in the South East of Northumberland.

Connect4Change is the strategic body providing a voice and co-ordination for the community and voluntary sector in Northumberland. Their core mission is to work with partners to deliver a vibrant, effective, co-ordinated, sustainable and inclusive voluntary and community sector in Northumberland, where all individuals and communities are empowered to play a full part in local voluntary and community action. They provide a direct route for the consortium to hear the voices of the local community and also to ensuring that voluntary led arts activity is supported within the strong VCS infrastructure that exists.

The Development Phase (first 6 months)

Already we have put in place much of the community consultation work needed in the development phase having:

- Consulted over 120 individuals and organisations working in South East Northumberland to gain their views on how best to increase participation in the arts
- Comprehensively mapped existing arts activity across the area
- Commissioned research from Audiences North East into current engagement and barriers
- Held an event attended by over 50 people drawn from the above to specifically discuss the opportunities presented by Creative People and Places and how we might work together to respond
• Put out an open call for ideas and partnerships and received over 25 written expressions of interest from artists and organisations from across the country and further afield
• Held meetings with experts in health and well being, adult social care, community development, schools, youth workers, higher and further education, economic regeneration and libraries to discuss their perspective, aspirations and ability to contribute
• Held meetings and discussions with selected artists to explore their response the area and its distinct communities and explore potential projects
• Held two facilitated consultation events with local young people to explore their hopes for the Creative People and Places Programme
• Met with representatives from the University of Gothenburg who have developed expertise in health and culture evaluation and others working in arts and communities in Sweden to establish links

Having done much of the hard number crunching, audit work and more traditional consultation work already through the South East Northumberland Study, we intend to take a more radical and creative approach to talking to the community within the development phase of the project. It would also serve to build excitement and anticipation for the coming phases of activity within the various communities.

It is essentially an artist-led research and development project which will culminate in a significant moment to launch the Creative People and Places programme in South East Northumberland.

The project is a physical and metaphorical journey to map the imagination and cultural aspirations of people of all ages in South East Northumberland (SEN) and their communities.

We will visit the eight geographical communities within South East Northumberland over an initial period of six months to lay the groundwork for a series of future collaborations between artists and the communities, and between the communities themselves.

This will act as a highly developed (and visible) outreach mechanism, triggering creative conversations within the area. These conversations will take the form of a range of creative taster sessions exploring what it means to live in South East Northumberland.

The aim is to capture and most importantly, to translate visibly the full range of current cultural aspirations in the area, creating a platform to showcase them.

Alongside the artist-led we will be building an infrastructure for the delivery of the larger programme and responding to the community consultation. As detailed below we have already developed a number of exciting ideas but are keen to ensure that they are really responding to the community and delivering what they need.
We will be bringing together the information from the study, the formal consultation detailed above and the artist-led work. This will enable us to fully design and cost the infrastructure needed to deliver the project including the technical aspects, defining roles of project staff and partners and put in place the research and evaluation projects that will run throughout the main programme.

During this time we will also be looking outwards to identify how other areas have managed to increase arts participation through a community-led approach. We have already made contacts with partners in Cornwall, Dublin and Gothenburg to learn from their approach.

Together we will start the process of defining what great art means to the people of South East Northumberland.

At the end of the development phase we will have:

- A thorough understanding of the current arts environment in South East Northumberland
- Captured the views and aspirations of local people
- Learned from others in the UK and around the world who are successfully working in this way
- A fully costed business plan and well thought out project infrastructure based around our three main activity strands – artists, audiences and spaces
- An agreed commissioning process for artists that has the community voice at its heart
- Provisional commissions in place with key artists and organisations for year one of the project
- Research and evaluation framework and methodology in place
- Raised awareness and expectation and laid the groundwork for the main programme

**The main programme (February 2013 – October 2015)**

We are keen to develop a new approach to commissioning activity which, following the example of the Ashington Group again, is driven by the community and delivering against our own definition of excellence.

We have engaged the support of the playwright Lee Hall (*Pitmen Painters, Billy Elliot*) to help us in this work and act as our artistic champion. Rather than creating a grant programme which organisations can bid into, we will create a model of co-commissioning which draws on the expertise of all of the wider consortium members and local people.

There are a number of exciting and bold ideas that have emerged which give a sense of the scale of ambition that we have for the project and also the level of excellence that we intend to bring in terms of artistic input, community participation and research and evaluation. These ideas build on our vision set out earlier:
Artists

Over the three year programme we will create a number of significant artist interventions and long and short term residencies. Our aim is both to signpost a shift in profile for arts activity within the local community and outside of the area but also embed a way of working and set of skills within the arts community of the area that will outlive the initially funded phase of the programme.

The artists will be chosen because of their excellence in artistic product but also their ability to engage communities and resonance with local people. The themes of work will be those which have been identified through the consultation and set out in the vision above.

Already we have identified a number of potential partners and existing projects that we would like to bring to South East Northumberland whilst emphasising that we want to respond to the community consultation before taking the decision to progress them.

We have been talking to artists such as Slung Low, Northern Stage, David Almond and Live Theatre as well as cutting edge digital artists and individuals and organisations from across the world.

Audiences

As discussed, we would put a significant emphasis in the main programme on working with audiences in settings familiar to them to help them access and engage with artists and arts opportunities. As well as increasing actual participation through the work, our aim is to develop two significant action research projects which will help us to understand the impacts of arts participation on people's lives:

Health and well-being

Working with NHS North of Tyne we will deliver a sustained programme of GP and health professional referrals into arts activity.

Social prescribing, utilising Arts on Prescription, has been quite widely used for people with mild to moderate mental health problems, and has shown a range of positive outcomes, including emotional, cognitive and social benefits.

Social prescribing may also be a route to reducing social exclusion, both for disadvantaged, isolated and vulnerable populations in general, and for people with enduring mental health problems. Mental health benefits may relate to the development of self-expression and self esteem, to opportunities for social contact and participation and/or to providing a sense of purpose and meaning and improved quality of life.

The scheme will be accompanied by a robust evaluation project aiming to build on the significant research that exists from elsewhere. This will
determine the improvements in patient’s health and well-being brought about by the arts activities with a view to creating a case for sustained NHS funding of arts activities as a cost effective alternative to current clinical measures.

We are very lucky to have full access to the NHS North of Tyne research, their evaluation framework and personnel. We will benefit from their desire to create a national exemplar project within South East Northumberland and, through our links to the University of Gothenburg, across Europe.

**Young People**
Young people who, as described above, face many challenges living in the area will be a major emphasis for our work throughout the programme. This was identified as a key priority in the South East Northumberland Arts Development which highlighted the poor offer arts offer that currently exists for children and young people and its disjointed nature. It also builds on a highly successful heritage participation project run by Woodhorn. Our consultation with young people to date has identified a number of priority areas for work. We have been talking to Gem Arts about working on a project to introduce young people in the area to different cultures and experiences addressing what is a very monocultural environment in which to grow up.

**Social Energy**
Working with People United, we want to put in place an action research project designed to create a methodology and measure for the creation of social energy or pro-social behaviour through arts activity. It is our belief that participating in arts activity improves people’s desire to engage more with their community, drives social activism and encourages neighbourly behaviour but these things have traditionally been very hard to measure.

We will work with People United, a national leader in this field and Northumbria University to develop a way of measuring this and building on devices such as the ‘happiness app’. This could become a nationally recognised way of measuring the development of social energy through arts.

**Quality Participatory Work**
Working with Helix Arts we will develop ways of ensuring standards of quality within participation work. As articulated in the Henley Review in cultural education ‘quality of the interaction is of utmost importance. A poor experience during childhood could risk putting a child off future similar cultural activities into adulthood.’

We want to develop standards which will both ensure our work is delivering the highest quality with people of all ages and also build skills, expertise and ways of working within South East Northumberland that can act as exemplars for others around the UK.

**Spaces**
South East Northumberland has a very poor infrastructure for creating or showing art. It has no recognised ‘arts centres’ of any scale whilst venues
such as Woodhorn and the Phoenix Theatre in Blyth which do have space to show work are already productively programmed and often unable to fulfil demand.

*Pop-up Venues*
Our plan is to create a virtue of this lack of traditional infrastructure and instead create a new network of spaces within communities and at places already well used by the community. This will involve working within empty and popular shops (Woodhorn already works effectively with ASDA in Ashington to showcase archive photos), libraries, sports centres and other spaces.

There will be a need to create a range of highly portable and flexible pieces of equipment that would be available to enable venues to be quickly converted to fit-for-purpose arts spaces.

*Starlight Castles*
Throughout the life of the project, we would like to create completely new but entirely temporary architectural features to act as venues for art across the area.

The idea is based on the legend of the Starlight Castle at Seaton Delaval Hall which the Delaval’s are said to have built ‘overnight’ to fulfil a wager and then dismantled. Our Castle’s would be built from sustainable materials (eg hay bales) and appear and disappear across South East Northumberland.

**Building Long-Term Capacity**

Throughout the programme is a strong running theme of building capacity and legacy into the future. This will mean creating strong leadership and close networks of activity amongst the arts sector, making the case for sustainable funding from organisations and individuals and embedding ways of working.

In particular:

*Building Evidence Base*
We will use the evidence and evaluation from the first three years to make a case for funding from a wider range of sources, eg health and social care, over the longer term.

Our research partners have been carefully chosen to provide a mix of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ measures. This includes the action research of People United and Helix Arts, the empirical rigour of NHS North of Tyne and the academic perspective of University of Northumbria and University of Gothenburg.

*Building Capacity*
Encouraging the establishment of more professional arts organisations in South East Northumberland based on an increased market and environment in which artists can thrive.
Working with Connect4change and other voluntary sector support to maintain and strengthen a vibrant voluntary arts community.

Embedding the skills and contacts within the community to work with professional artists and generate new activity.

**Supporting The Network**
Bringing artists and arts organisations together to develop joint working, learn from each other and share a long term vision. Creating shared resources, efficiencies and profile raising opportunities.

**Fundraising Advice/Support**
Ensure artists and organisations in South East Northumberland are equipped to take advantage of funding opportunities and in particular access ACE grants for the arts funding.

**Infrastructure**
We will put in place a significant project infrastructure to enable this work and ensure that continued community-led decision making remains at the heart of the project.

**Physical Resources**
We will create a stock of modular technical equipment designed to enhance the artistic experience both in small venues and in larger spaces and ensure expertise to go alongside it. We will also introduce mobile gallery equipment enabling many different spaces to become visual arts venues eg within shops and libraries. It will include digital equipment – projectors, laptops etc suitable for participatory work, shared screenings and web-based work.

**Marketing and Profile Raising**
We will put in place a significant profile raising programme to increase audiences, showcase the work of existing and new artists and generate a buzz within the local communities. Community Radio is very popular in South East Northumberland and we would look to explore not only its role in reaching people but also as a potential medium for artists in the creation of work. A dedicated project website would both serve marketing and arts content purposes.

**Management and Administration**
We will put in place dedicated project staff to manage the specific areas of the programme identified above ie working with spaces, artists and audiences (including dedicated staffing on both young people and health). In addition a marketing officer and programme director will work across the entire project. Woodhorn would provide a base for office space and access to training, financial management, IT support, insurance etc.

**Timeline**
September 2012
Commission artist-led consultation
Appoint of freelance project manager for development phase

September 2012 - January 2013
Work with artists in 4 communities
Deliver development phase
Produce business plan
Agree funding with ACE
Hold South East Northumberland Arts Network meeting

Feb/Mar 2013
Appoint project staff
Develop of evaluation framework/action research methodology

April 2013
Host high profile launch event

April – June 2013
Commence artist commissioning process
Purchase modular equipment and other resources
Start GP/health worker referral programme

Summer 2013
Hold high profile outdoor events

Autumn 2013
Commence community venues programme
Continue arts in health work
Deliver commissioned work

Years 2&3
Continue commissioning
Deliver in depth community work around health and young people
Enable systematic delivery through venues and infrastructure support
Begin action research projects
Hold high profile events and activities
Hold reviews with key stakeholders
Deliver capacity building activities within the sector
Continue community consultation

Legacy

Even before the launch of Creative People and Places we had identified the need to improve the lives of people in South East Northumberland through arts participation. The South East Northumberland Arts Development Study has enabled us to create a ten year vision which is achievable and responsive to the particular needs of our communities.
Our vision will create long-term change in levels of arts participation, driven by the creativity and ambition of the people living here, and have a demonstrable effect on the well-being of local people and levels of social energy and activism within communities.

We believe that through the programme outlined above, the strength of our consortium, our understanding of high quality art and processes and our commitment to put local communities at the heart of decision making we can deliver this vision.

Moreover the action research elements of the project will help to create a case for sustainable funding from other agencies working in health, social care and community cohesion which will help to sustain a higher level of joined up opportunities continuing to be responding to the needs and desires of the community.

Just as 80 years ago the Ashington Group of Pitmen Painters became renowned around the world for their art, we believe that people in South East Northumberland will once again show that, given the right opportunities, they can achieve exceptional things.
“I would like to lend my huge support to the Woodhorn bid. It is a well thought through, exciting and innovative bid to use art to make a substantial difference to the lives of people and communities which have been hit harshly in the last few decades as the traditional industries of the region have declined precipitously.

The Ashington area has a proud tradition of bringing artistic endeavour of the highest order to people who would have had little or no ability to do it without the efforts of hugely brave and original schemes. Back in the 1930's the WEA provided the model which has become the 'norm' in arts teaching in every school in the country - a process documented in my play the Pitmen Painters. More recently the work of George Stephenson brought some of the most interesting and original voices in all art forms to the region and effected the lives of many people. I was hugely influenced by the publications, posters and poetry promoted by George when he ran MidNag. The current proposal is proudly in that tradition using art as a transformative force.

The key to all these projects success has been the understanding that the very best practitioners and the highest aspirations of artists are the ones most likely to transform lives most fully. The understanding that this art can and should take place in non-traditional venues is a crucial and important part of the thinking.

I wholly support and encourage this initiative. I can think of no better way to honour and promote the example of the Pitmen Painters and my own efforts to show that art should be a valuable and important part of all our lives.”

Lee Hall, June 2012