



| Creatives for London

October 2021

Culture & Commerce Taskforce



Creatives for London is a project aimed at promoting the value of employing creatives in teams working on built environment projects. Through a condensed review of four live City of London Corporation projects which have creatives embedded within the Square Mile, this report develops an understanding of the value of embedding a cultural or creative person within a built environment project team, identifying benefits and any lessons learnt that would contribute towards a best practice approach.

Interviews were undertaken with creatives and those in commissioning or project management roles to provide insight into the project experiences and impacts so far. The report first examines the four case studies, and then reviews key themes and next steps.

Projects explored within this report:

- 1** Smithfield Public Realm Project
- 2** Moor Lane Garden + Poem
- 3** Gaia's Garden
- 4** Sculpture in The City
Aldgate Square Commission

Though limited in scope, the case studies have provided a major insight into the effectiveness of employing creatives in built environment projects. As the case studies were at different stages, conclusions to the overall effectiveness could not be drawn, but the value in each case has already been significant. The case studies span a range of experiences, exploring innovative approaches, culture and commerce partnerships, and commissioning processes.

100%
of participants benefitted from the experience

100%
of project representatives said creatives added value to the project

100%
of creatives said it was their first experience on a built environment project and would do something like it again

80%
of project representatives had experience working with a creative on a built environment project previously

Smithfield Public Realm Project

Overview

The City of London Corporation, in partnership with architects Hawkins\Brown and Culture Mile are undertaking a major project building on the aspirations of Culture Mile and the City Transport Strategy, transforming Smithfield to create an ambitious pedestrian-focused public realm.¹

Hawkins\Brown are leading the collaborative design team, with a multiple perspectives approach centred around co-curation with local communities and organisations. Work started at the beginning of 2020 and is at concept design stage. Contemporary Art Society (CAS) were appointed as cultural consultants on the design team and co-developed the brief with City of London and Hawkins\Brown, leading the commission of the artist with assistance from a public art steering group. After an open briefing session and interviews, Larry Achiampong was selected as artist-in-residence.

“

We protected the openness of the brief, and it allowed the artist to come in and help shape what it would become. It wasn't 'you get on with this and deliver this by then', there was a process of refining the brief together, about how we wanted to work.

ESME FIELDHOUSE
HAWKINS\BROWN

”

1. <https://www.hawkinsbrown.com/projects/smithfield-public-realm>



Smithfield Public Realm Project continued

The idea

Past experiences working with artists on built environment projects hinted at the value of having the artist integrated into the process, and not as a separate strand. Embedding an artist-in-residence into the design team was radical as it was a new concept in architecture, and more so public realm design. Instead of requiring any prescribed outputs, this innovative, inward-facing approach focussed on the design process itself by opening it to a different, creative perspective. This was a new way of working for everyone involved and there was a collective acknowledgement that flexibility and collaboration were paramount to the process. Challenging the outputs focussed industry mindset to explore the unfamiliar was ambitious but led to valuable results.

The brief

The development of the brief was a crucial part of creating a strong foundation for the artist. There was an understanding across all partners to keep it as open as possible which enabled a wide range of creative practices to be considered.

The brief had three key strands for the artist:

- to be a critical friend to the design team
- do their own research and practice
- undertake stakeholder mapping and community engagement

The brief was then refined collaboratively with the artist once they were on board, to bring in their approach and adapt the brief to optimise their way of working. This openness enabled the artist to be agile, connecting a range of voices involving the design team, cultural stakeholders and local communities and extending conversations to wider audiences, ensuring diverse public discourse.

The creative process

Covid-19 inevitably disrupted project timelines, and instead of the residency taking place during a particular period of work, the artist sat in between intensive design stages. This unexpectedly benefitted the project by enabling the team to become fully invested in the creative process, encouraging more expansive conversations that developed and strengthened the design concept.

Initially, there were some communication barriers working across sectors as the design team's habits of working were disparate to the artist's way of working. Having a broker with artist management expertise was effective in liaising the relationship between the design team and artist, as they were able to bridge the gap in those instances and develop solutions that would work for everyone.



“

We had got quite used to having Teams calls and having to make stuff into PDF presentations and flicking through them. As soon as we started trying to communicate like that with Larry, it just didn't work at all. He found it creatively stifling, and I think once he raised that, we realised we were finding it very stifling as well.

ESME FIELDHOUSE
HAWKINS\BROWN

”

Smithfield Public Realm Project continued

“

We were talking about our very different experiences of being in a place and our different knowledge and our different cultural references and finding a way of sharing them and being together with them, and that's ultimately what you hope to find in great public space.

MEGAN O'SHEA
CONTEMPORARY ART SOCIETY

”

Working online through the pandemic exacerbated this barrier and made collaboration difficult, but the flexible approach enabled the team to be reactive and adjust to different working styles and needs. Alongside conventional video calls, the team incorporated a Miro Board, effectively a digital pinboard, creating collaborative space beyond meetings and enabling more diverse, creative communication. It became an invaluable resource both during the design stage and retrospectively as it became a living archive, capturing the process.

Workshops were undertaken with the artist and design team with themes that emerged through the process rather than being pre-determined at the beginning, which allowed it to be self-learning. The artist would start with check-ins, asking the team to share something creative that had resonated with them that week and they would discuss their responses to materials shared in advance by

the artist including films, music and podcasts. Instead of checking emails and phones during breaks, the team were encouraged to listen to a selected piece of music, reinvigorating them when returning to discussions. Bringing in broader cultural references within a fully immersive environment stimulated the team to think about the design through new perspectives and impacted how they approached their own practice as designers.

Whilst this new way of working took people out of their comfort zones, through the non-judgemental space, the team gradually opened up to the approach. This broke down the professional barrier, strengthening the design team relationship which enabled them to work on a deeper level. The workshops encouraged the team to overcome and embrace the cross-sector differences as a means of expanding knowledge and perspectives, and through this, the possibilities for public realm design.

Social engagement

Including the community as part of the collaborative process was important particularly due to the scale and impact the project would have on the area. Instead of fixed ideas to consult on, the team were committed to empowering communities to become active citizens in place with genuine agency to influence outcomes. The artist was able to identify gaps of engagement and develop creative ways of bringing underrepresented voices into the process, opening up opportunities for local people to be involved in shaping their built environment. Although the artist-in-residence stage has ended, social engagement is ongoing:

- Imagine packs have been dispersed through Culture Mile into the local community that will provide perspectives that will influence the next stage
- A youth panel is looking to be established
- The project is working with a group of people who have early stages of dementia

Having no prescribed physical outputs in the brief moved the process away from constraints and protocols of traditional output centric residencies and enabled the artist to organically involve the community in creative outputs. This included a film which reflected on place and perspectives of local people.



Impact, benefits + lessons learnt

Embarking on this new approach was a risk but exposing the internal workings of the project to a creative has had vast impacts that go beyond traditional measures of success. Bringing in this different, creative perspective broadened the design mindset and helped the team challenge the conventions of a design project approach and think beyond the traditional model, leading to innovation of the process and a strengthened legacy. The collaborative method united the design team, artist and community, creating a deeper understanding and investment in the process.

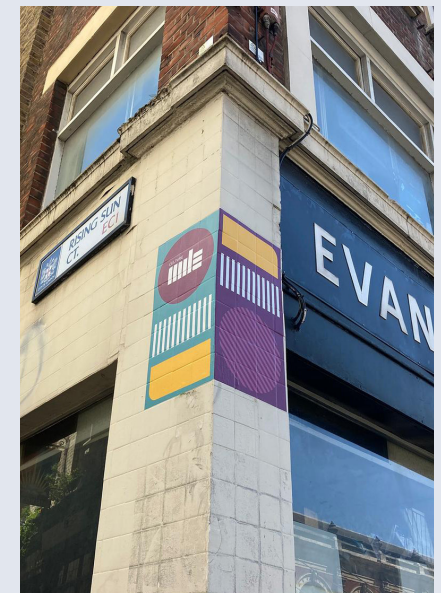
Not only has it enriched the Smithfield Project, but it has also shaped how those involved will move forwards with future projects and their own practices, ultimately influencing the process of public realm design. It has opened up conventional methodologies, and this, though intangible, is an invaluable outcome of the project. Through its success, there is a desire to take the methodology into other projects and share the process more widely, so others can learn and benefit from it. The impacts of the artist-in-residence will be seen as the project progresses.

“

Having an artist-in-residence within a design team is something that I would push for with any design project.

ESME FIELDHOUSE
HAWKINS\BROWN

”



Moor Lane Community Garden and Poem

Overview

The Moor Lane Community Garden is a temporary installation, created in partnership with the City of London Corporation, Culture Mile and landscape firm Wayward. It provides new green space in the city for local residents and visitors to enjoy, with the aim to also inform future permanent greening in the area.

In response to community feedback, the project was widened to incorporate a creative element and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama were appointed to manage the commission of a poet, in close consultation with Department of the Built Environment.

Kit Finnie was appointed as poet for the project through a closed commissioning process. This was both her first lead artist role and first experience working on a built environment project. Her role involved developing a series of workshops with community groups, which would then inform the creation of a final poem to be displayed in the garden.

Collaborating with the Guildhall School of Music & Drama created additional opportunities for emerging creatives, with a group of students joining the project. The students involvement was unanticipated but soon became invaluable to the artist, benefitting the creative process and project as it developed. The project process has been completed and the garden and poem can currently be visited by the public.



“

In terms of career development, I'm still an emerging artist in the grand scheme of things, and so being offered a lead artist role is really exciting.

”

KIT FINNIE
LEAD ARTIST

Moor Lane Community Garden and Poem continued



The creative process

For the creatives, embarking on their first built environment project and creatively responding to a specific site during the pandemic, where they were unable to physically interact with the space could have been a significant barrier. Yet, the poet was able to bring in a creative mindset and utilise the restrictions as a motivator to help inform the process, exploring this concept through the outputs. The new collaborative approach led to space for wider creative thinking that elevated the project around the restrictions imposed by the pandemic; exploring innovative ways to make community engagement more impactful within the online space. This dialogue was stimulating for the artist and students and pushed them to develop new methods of thinking and ideation.

Community engagement

As part of the process, eight poetry and writing workshops were developed and delivered online in collaboration with the lead artist and students. Charities and local community groups were invited to take part to help inform the final poem for the garden and create their own poems which were then featured on the Culture Mile website. Despite the low turnout to some workshops, likely as a result of Zoom fatigue, they were well-constructed with each one exploring unique concepts, and enabled the creatives to develop their facilitation skills. Had the workshops been in person, there was confidence that they would have had greater participation. Having the community included in the process and outcome created a more collaborative and impactful result.



I had some fantastically useful conversations in terms of how I'm thinking about my practice... the idea of workshopping via zoom and the possibilities of that, rather than the limitations, and how you can push things that at first feel like really annoying barriers.

KIT FINNIE
LEAD ARTIST



From a project management perspective, having a creative added value as their practice helped overcome the difficulties commonly associated with traditional community engagement in built environment schemes, positively impacting public perceptions. Adding another dimension to the project beyond planting gave a clear motive for the community to get involved and helped define the project.

Impact, benefits + lessons learnt

The Moor Lane Garden and Poem has been a successful experience for the team. It has given the project manager confidence to scale things up, similarly raising the confidence of the creatives involved, enabling them to develop new skills and widen future opportunities and collaborations. The lead artist is keen to undertake another built environment project without the limitations of the pandemic, to be able to experience the space she is writing for.

"It ended up being a ghostly part of the project that I was just imagining rather than really experiencing."

KIT FINNIE
LEAD ARTIST

Moor Lane Community Garden and Poem continued

Partnering with a creative institution

Leaning into the Culture Mile model meant the partnerships, structure and support were in place to effectively deliver the creative side of the project, enabling the overall team to deliver more as a whole. Undertaking the project in this way proved that embedding creatives does not need to be a resource implication and has opened ideas for future collaborations. As capacity was limited within the built environment team, having the creative side managed externally was hugely beneficial:

- It enabled access to a wider creative network with key audiences the City wanted to involve
- It opened up new opportunities to grow the project and include more emerging creatives
- Their expertise meant they could effectively manage the creative process to a greater extent than could be achieved internally

Greater collaboration

Whilst the separation of the creative commission was beneficial to the efficiency of the project, there was a desire to have a more united way of working where the project team could be more involved in the creative process. This was also reflected on the creative side as the disjunct between the creatives and wider project team left them feeling one step removed.

The unanticipated collaboration with the students added significant value to the creative process and the artist felt they should have been included in the final output. Expanding the project in this way shows how it can have wider benefits in future, and suggests a trajectory for the students to collaborate with a lead artist throughout the stages of critical thinking, community engagement and creating a final output would be a great learning experience.

Build legacy content to show the benefits

It can be difficult to show the value of the creative process beyond those who experienced it first-hand. Building evidence for why it's useful can help overcome when the approach is challenged and help wider stakeholders understand its value.

Layering creative digital content on top of the physical space extended the longevity of the project beyond the temporary site. The final poem, additional poems written by the community and a film created by students of the artist narrating the poem can be accessed online, widening audiences and impact.



“

It's a balance of how much time you're able to give to that commissioning process and how involved you can be, versus do you try and be really efficient and you just give it completely to someone and say, deliver this by this day.

KATIE ADNAMS
CITY PUBLIC REALM

”

“

It's nice not to work in silos and to be exposed to different perspectives.

KATIE ADNAMS
CITY PUBLIC REALM

”

Additional support for creatives

An emerging artist taking on a lead artist role is a significant career step and there needs to be additional support in place to enable them to thrive, as they may not have the experience or level of confidence coming into the project. The artist felt unsure about where the boundaries were in how far they could push the brief or whether they were able to restructure it in a way that was truer to their creative process and outcomes. Although the support was available should they reach out, there was resistance to do so as it was their first lead role and so wanted to impress. Creating the space for open conversation and developing the relationship through regular check-ins would help with this aspect of the project, as early career artists may need encouragement to raise issues and concerns.



Gaia's Garden

Overview

Gaia's Garden was a meanwhile community urban garden that opened to the public in July 2021, situated on Holborn Viaduct. It was one of four youth-led projects that emerged from the cultural incubator, The Pattern, which was the winning solution of The Culture Mile & Foundation for Future London Fusion Prize by creative studio, Play Nice.

Led by Cultural Producer Nate Agbetu, the garden was built and programmed by creatives, young people and volunteers, creating a new vibrant, inclusive grassroots space that enabled communities to engage with sustainable practices and connect after lockdown.² The programming has now ended, with workshops that enabled a wide range of people across the City to take plants from the garden home with them.

Culture Mile brokered the relationship between Play Nice and real estate and investment group Dominvs Group, encouraging Play Nice to pitch for programming funding, and to transition the space from a derelict site into a community garden. It was a reciprocal partnership as Dominvs Group were keen to create a meanwhile use for the site that had social impact and Play Nice wanted

a site to build a sustainable green space that elevated the voices of marginalised communities. A carefully curated creative team of people with varied expertise but a collective vision helped overcome the complexities of the project and lay the foundations for its success.

The site had vast potential as it was located opposite Thameslink station when people were returning to the city after lockdown, but it needed a creative mindset to envision its transformation. Nate's experience communicating ideas in cultural and commercial spaces meant that he could articulate his ambitions successfully across the sectors. Having both the vision and skills to communicate effectively led to the commercial partner getting on board and having confidence in the process.

2. <https://www.gaiasgarden.london/about-us>



Gaia's Garden continued

“

There was a lot of trust early on, and bringing a business that works so heavily in the commercial space into a partnership that was backed by a public entity definitely helped us foster strong ties and mutual goals very early on.

”

NATE AGBETU
PLAY NICE

The partnership

The partnership was ambitious as this was a new experience and scale for everyone involved, but there was a high level of trust on both sides from the outset. The commercial partner provided a blank canvas and the funds but understood that imposing limitations would compromise the authenticity of the space and so gave the creatives freedom to transform it. Being led by the creatives and young people ensured it was true to the creative vision, creating a more genuine output.

Direct communication between the commercial and creative partners meant everyone stayed on the same page and greater ambitions could be achieved. Problems that occurred

in the process were often due to mistranslation or miscommunication and so having this relationship supported by Culture Mile as broker was an effective way of bridging the gap between the sectors.

Community engagement

Gaia's Garden had high social value through community activation, particularly throughout its programming period. The transformation welcomed a wide range of users into the garden, bringing in higher numbers than expected. The high-quality programming provided a range of engaging, free activities including film screenings, community painting, performances and sustainable skills workshops which had a positive response from attendees.

Impact, benefits + lessons learnt so far

Gaia's Garden has been an extremely successful project, exceeding expectations of all stakeholders involved. This has been reflected through the project being extended, the budget increasing threefold and the programming period doubling. The commercial partner being open to taking risks enabled the team to be ambitious and ultimately increased the value of the project. This level of investment in the project's vision was impressive and had not been seen to this extent through this kind of partnership before.

From a developers perspective, Gaia's Garden is an example of how culture and commerce can work together to achieve real impactful change.



“

That's what the Culture Mile role often became. It's like taking business speak and transitioning it into a more creative language.

**ROSEMARIA
MATHER-LUPTON**
CULTURE MILE

”

The project has been a valuable experience for those involved and has, on a wider level, provided jobs, created new green space and empowered the community to become active citizens in placemaking, whilst genuinely platforming diverse voices. It also connected a strong community of people focussed on addressing serious social issues, giving them a space to grow their practice. Through the project, networks have expanded, particularly among young people, and the project has had media coverage through channels that allow wider audiences to learn about placemaking.

Gaia's Garden continued



Through the project there have been:

- 230 volunteer sign-ups to build the space
- 70 young people engaged in building the garden
- 2000 followers to social channels over a two-week period
- 1500 event sign ups across events/ activations in the space
- 10 part time jobs created for young people engaging in creative and cultural practices
- Paid opportunities for a further 50 people through programming and activities in the space
- Over 20 paid projects for creative and cultural practitioners through the production of the space³



3. Statistics from Play Nice



“

It's the case study I've been waiting for... We've hit policies in the Covid recovery just days into the lockdown ended, had global talent come and use the space to shoot their music videos, shared moments when city workers, young people and activists could convene and build together. After this, I'll definitely be turning my hand to more projects just like it in the hopes of building my own institution one day.

NATE AGBETU
PLAY NICE

”

Strengthening professional skills and nurturing creative talent

Opportunities for young people in the creative sector were extensive, with employment being an unexpected impact due to the need for additional staff on-site. At a time when there are significant barriers for young people to enter the creative industries, being able to provide paid roles was fulfilling for the team. The process empowered young creatives through mentoring and the experience of working on such a large-scale project expanded their portfolio, skill sets and career progression. The cultural producer was most proud of being able to create a team of young people that could produce, curate and facilitate.

The scale and complexity of this project was a new learning experience for everyone involved but its success has demonstrated the potential of what can be achieved when commerce and culture collaborate. It challenged misconceptions about each sector and showed that, with the right support, the sector's strengths can complement each other to create a greater outcome that benefits business and culture alike. Moving forward, there is hope that more developers openly adopt a mind-set of incorporating the community and remain mindful of their needs and wants throughout the development process.

Gaia's Garden has encouraged the team to be more ambitious in projects moving forwards and has widened people's practices and skills, subsequently raising confidence and career aspirations of creatives to work within the public realm. Those involved are looking forward to undertaking similar projects in the future.

Sculpture in The City Aldgate Square Commission

Overview

Sculpture in The City is a project that transforms the public realm in the City into an annual sculpture park, delivered by City of London Corporation in collaboration with Lacuna, a creative projects consultancy, and local businesses.

It has been running for over ten years, but, this year, the project was taken wider with the creation of a new biannual commission: The Aldgate Square Commission, delivered in partnership with The City of London Corporation Outdoor Arts Programme and the Aldgate Connect BID.⁴ This new commission showcases emerging UK artists, creating two exciting new pieces of temporary public art for Aldgate Square.

The Aldgate Square Commission is underway, and the winners have been announced as Jocelyn McGregor and Emii Alrai. Their work will launch in Aldgate Square sequentially in Spring Summer 2022 and 2023.



4. <https://www.sculptureinthecity.org.uk/aldgate-square-commission>

Sculpture in The City Aldgate Square Commission continued



The commissioning process

There was a collaborative commissioning approach led by Lacuna which included an arts advisory group, City of London Corporation and other stakeholders in the area. The opportunity was exclusive to younger artists who were within five years of their public art practice. Recommended artists were put forward by the arts advisory group and from these, twelve were invited to submit a proposal. These were then shortlisted to five and after a process of public engagement workshops and proposal phases, two winners were then selected.

For emerging artist and winner, Jocelyn McGregor, this was her first experience working on a built environment project, and she was motivated to expand her work beyond gallery space into a non-arts context and learn about the limitations, and tips and tricks of public sculpture.

The openness of the brief gave scope for her to be ambitious and to propose something unique. Working with emerging artists required a different style of communication and support which was made difficult by the pandemic moving the process online, distancing and sanitising interactions. Despite the barriers, this was overcome by a genuine eagerness from the emerging artists to engage.

Community engagement

A key part of the commission was to involve the community in the process. Workshops were undertaken with local communities by the five shortlisted artists to help inform their proposals, creating a space for communities to have a voice in influencing the outcome. Working collaboratively with City of London, each artist identified the type of community they wanted to work with, and call outs were made through community services. The workshops attracted a diverse range of participants and included students, local residents, and older people.



It was such a surprise how fruitful those conversations were and how specific some of the input was.

JOCELYN MCGREGOR,
ARTIST



Half of it's a psychological thing because someone got your materials sorted and they've got it delivered to this space, and it's all set up and lunch is catered for at the back. You automatically feel supported.

JOCELYN MCGREGOR,
ARTIST



The workshops were able to be socially distanced at Toynbee Hall, which was a fulfilling experience for both facilitators and participants, with people valuing face-to-face interaction.

Winning artist Jocelyn McGregor ran a body casting workshop, where participants could create something they could then take home.

Having this creative element differed to a traditional public consultation format, making it informal and less intimidating. This opened up the conversation, making it really engaging, which enabled Jocelyn to push her concept further and include the community in her design. Undertaking community engagement as a means to inform the creative process, and not to simply share an outcome was a new, valuable learning experience for the artist and had a greater impact than expected.

Impact, benefits + lessons learnt so far

The commissioning process has been a great success so far, and working with emerging artists has been a different, refreshing, and exciting experience for the team. Bringing in new perspectives that differed to more experienced artists has enriched the process and the artists' genuine hunger to learn and get involved on a deeper level made it a fulfilling experience.

Sculpture in The City Aldgate Square Commission continued

“

It's been really eye opening to see how much scope and how much freedom there actually is in public sculpture. I'd always thought in the past there would be so many parameters, that it might be quite an impossible field to go into.

JOCELYN MCGREGOR,
ARTIST

”

Collaboration

The commission shows that, in the right context, working collaboratively can have huge benefits. Building a strong team of people across different organisations and departments brought a range of expertise and access to a wider network, particularly to communities that would have otherwise been hard to reach. This positively impacted the creative process as it facilitated authentic community engagement which could effectively inform the artists' proposals, making the outcome stronger.

Support for emerging artists

By the team acknowledging the needs of emerging artists, the process felt supported, despite

the pandemic's restrictions. Having the community engagement workshops organised by the team really affected the workshop experience, allowing everyone to relax in the space, easing the pressure on the artist and enabling them to fully focus on facilitating.

A learning experience

For winning artist Jocelyn, the process so far has been a huge learning experience; developing new skills and understanding of the elements of creating public artwork. The process challenged some of her assumptions about the limitations of creating work for public realm and helped her realise that it could be an achievable trajectory for her practice. This has given her the self-belief to undertake similar open calls and commissions in the future, equipped with the underpinning knowledge of the parameters involved.

Challenging conventions, opening doors

Being put forward and ultimately selected for the commission was eye opening and empowering for Jocelyn as the opportunity was accessed through talent, not connections. This highlights the importance of having accessible commissions for emerging artists, as it challenged conventions of prestigious opportunities being unattainable and exclusive. The commission opened doors to showcase new talent, enabling

“

It's engaging for the passer by, the local worker, the church congregation member who goes there every Sunday, to the kids who go and sit in the square after school. But it's also engaged because it has come through a process of community engagement workshops, so it speaks very much to that experience that the artist had running those workshops.

STELLA IOANNOU,
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

”

emerging artists to progress in their career at a time when it has been made more difficult due to the pandemic.

Deeper engagement

This was the first time community engagement had been approached in this way and integrating it into the process was ambitious and effective. Giving the community agency to help inform the artist's proposal made it genuinely collaborative, which

ultimately added value to the artwork and Aldgate Square, as it reflected a shared experience with the community who use the space.

The overall process was so enriching and insightful that there is a desire to introduce more commissions into Sculpture in The City so that the programme connects deeper to context, the space and the community who use it.



Summary of findings

It has been demonstrated through these case studies that having a creative embedded within a built environment team can be highly effective. Despite barriers imposed by Covid-19, the experience of those involved has been positive with some projects even innovating through the limitations.

Some approaches explored have been ground breaking for public realm and the impact has changed the way people will embark on their practice in the future. Those interviewed were highly encouraging for teams working on future projects considering employing creatives to take the risk and go for it.

The report has shown that projects are going to be different, that there is no blueprint to embedding a creative within a built environment team. But being collaborative, open, and agile is a methodology for best practice that can be adapted to other places and projects.

Through these projects, embedding a creative into a built environment team has shown to deliver:

new employment opportunities
young and emerging creative talent has been nurtured,
growing professional skill sets
wider networks and collaborations with organisations in the City and beyond
genuine, sustainable connections have been fostered with wider communities
vibrant new creative spaces have welcomed people back to the City after lockdown
communities have been empowered through creatives to be involved in public realm design
the actual process of design team style has started to innovate to create new impacts
moving forwards



Key themes

Time + resources

In order to fully reap the benefits of having a creative involved in a built environment project, there needs to be sufficient time and resources to enable the project team to become immersed in the creative experience too. In some cases, internal capacity was limited, and so commissioning a creative expert to manage the process was an efficient solution, but this separated the experience, making the teams feel disjointed. Working in a time frame outside of tight deadlines or acknowledging the value of having a more embedded approach could facilitate more effective opportunities for creatives, with greater outcomes.

New perspectives

Inviting a creative mind into the project process gives a refreshed perspective that can drive the project forward in new innovative ways. Being able to creatively problem solve around the barriers and limitations in both public realm design and the pandemic was a key attribute of many of the creatives across the projects. Bringing these set of skills inward-facing, enabled a critical perspective that encouraged transformation of habitual methodology.

Have a broker

Having a broker between the creative and the client or design team is effective in bridging the communication gap between the sectors, helping to translate sector language and overcome glitches in the process.

The process is as important as the outputs

The case studies showed that undertaking the process with the creatives was hugely significant and enriched the overall experience. Therefore, it needs to be recognised that the process can be as important, if not more so, than the outputs. Taking the risk to not have a brief with specific physical outputs has proven to be transformative, as it enabled teams to work beyond the restrictions and time constraints associated with public realm installations, giving them freedom to become fully invested in the process, alongside enabling the artist to authentically explore their practice and brief.

Show value

There have been questions raised about how to show the benefits of a process focussed approach to clients, and how to measure a project's success if there are no outputs.

Having a way of recording the benefits or documenting the process can create legacy content beyond the project's lifespan whilst showcasing the values of embedding a creative.

Be open and flexible

Being open in the approach from the outset allowed greater freedom, enabling teams to be reactive to changing needs and barriers, producing more authentic results with greater impacts. Maintaining creative freedom should be considered essential to the approach, and though parameters can be set, or goals put in place, it shouldn't be overly restrictive or limit the creative's potential. Getting a contract in place that can then be collaboratively reviewed and adapted as the project evolves should be considered.

Be ambitious

Taking risks is part of the creative process and having a strong team ready to push the project further creates more impactful results. Stretching beyond comfort zones and entering the unfamiliar can be challenging, but a supportive environment can overcome this.

“

Too often briefs can become really prescriptive, and the reason that you might wish an artist to get involved with the project is to actually break free of some of those prescriptions and to think in a different way to bring a unique perspective. So, it's no good if you actually tell them how to be thinking, what's the point of that?

MEGAN O'SHEA
CONTEMPORARY ART SOCIETY

”

Key themes continued



The more engaged the collaboration is, the more you get from it.

STELLA IOANNOU
SCULPTURE IN THE CITY



Collaborate

In the right context, this has been seen to be pivotal to pushing projects to achieve greater success. Through all aspects of the process, collaboration should be considered: from getting the client more included; to leaning on networks to make ideas happen; to empowering the wider community to get involved; to working with artists to shape the project in a way that works for them. Utilising cross sector paradigms as a means of bringing in new perspectives and expertise and building up a collaborative network or team across organisations was hugely beneficial to the projects.

Embed social engagement into the process

Having a creative person on board makes social engagement become a step above consultation, enabling communities to be active participants in the process through positive, creative engagement. This is valuable as it can help change negative perceptions of built environment projects. Having creative outputs that include the community in the process raise the social value of the project, and create genuine, sustainable relationships with local communities.

Create the conditions for creatives to thrive

Particularly for emerging artists, taking on a public realm commission can be a huge career step, and there needs to be support in place to enable the creative to be confident in their practice. Extra steps need to be taken to ensure that they feel included as part of the team, and that the team is approachable should any issues arise. In the cases where the commissioning process was outsourced, the disconnect from the team seemed to be greatest, and so taking time to develop the relationship through open, direct communication, regular check ins and a collaborative approach can help the creatives to effectively undertake the project and be more ambitious.

Next steps

Following this report, the opportunities, subject to further funding, are:

To supplement this research with a comparable private sector review, led by a commercial partner

To share findings in support of a London-wide campaign encouraging commissioning leads across the city to employ artists and creatives as part of a built environment project team

To partner with a private sector organisation regarding a platform that connects commissioning leads and creatives together and facilitates placements

Routine monitoring of the value of creatives in City of London built environment projects

The aims for the longer term legacy of the project are:

Acceleration of employment of creatives in built environment projects

Creativity, innovation, or design of built environment projects is enhanced

More paid opportunities exist for creatives to add value to the built environment sector

Advice from creatives, for creatives working on public realm



Be flexible

When designing for the public realm, your design will be experienced by a lot more people so it's about creating art that works for everyone. Work out what is core to your design concept and be prepared to flex the rest as what you proposed at the beginning might be different to the end result.



Be proactive

Utilise the opportunity to grow your network and get involved on a deeper level.



Reach out

Taking on a commission is a big step and asking for support or clarification is not a weakness. If something isn't working, reach out to the team for help.



Make limitations a creative challenge

Working in public realm, especially in the context of the pandemic, can have its limitations. But utilise your creative mindset to turn the limitations into opportunities and make it part of the creative experience.



Do your research

Make sure that you submit a realistic proposal that's in budget and achievable, so you don't fall flat at the first hurdle.



Document the process

This can help inform the commission and generate future ideas.

With thanks to interviewees:

Smithfield Public Realm Project

Esme Fieldhouse + Megan O' Shea

Moor Lane Garden and Poem

Katie Adnams + Kit Finnie

Gaia's Garden

Rosemara Mather-Lupton + Nate Agbetu

Sculpture in The City Aldgate Square Commission

Stella Ioannou + Jocelyn McGregor

Author

Kat Pegler

Photo credits

Front cover: © Francisco Augusto / Play Nice; page 2 © Emile Holba; page 3 © Hawkins\Brown (top); page 3 © Odera Okoye / Culture Mile (centre); page 3 © Odera Okoye / Culture Mile (bottom); page 4 © Hawkins\Brown (top); page 4 © Odera Okoye / Culture Mile (bottom); pages 5-7 © Em Davis / Culture Mile; page 8 © Ed Peacock / Play Nice; page 9 © Francis Augusto / Play Nice (top right); page 9 © Ed Peacock / Play Nice (bottom left); page 10 © Francis Augusto / Play Nice; page 11 © Byron Kalomamas (top right); page 11 © Jocelyn McGregor (bottom left); page 12 Jun T. Lai, Bloom Paradise (2019), copyright the artist. Photo: © Nick Turpin (top left); page 12 Guillaume Vandame, symbols, (2019-2021), copyright the artist. Photo: © Nick Turpin (centre); page 13 Ruth Ewan, Silent Agitator (2019), A High Line Commission, Courtesy of the Artist and Rob Tufnell. Photo: © Nick Turpin (top right); page 16 Bram Ellens, Orphans (2018-2020), copyright the artist. Photo: © Nick Turpin (bottom right); page 14 © Em Davis / Culture Mile