



that  
word  
art!

# putting art back into planning

A practical guide  
for councils



**That Word Art! Putting Art Back into Planning**  
**A Practical Guide for Councils**



Town and Country Planning Association  
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**The Lady Margaret  
Paterson Osborn Trust**

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*'... that word art leads me to my last claim,  
which is that the material surroundings of my  
life should be pleasant, generous, and beautiful;  
that I know is a large claim, but this I will  
say about it, that if it cannot be satisfied, if  
every civilized community cannot provide  
such surroundings for all its members,  
I do not want the world to go on.'*

From 'How We Live and How We Might Live'  
William Morris, Lecture to the  
Hammersmith Socialist League, 1887

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# Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to reflect on the benefits and shortcomings of our homes and the places in which we live, and on our connection – or lack of it – with nature and each other. As our communities and economies are reshaped to face new challenges, art has a vital role in building a better future. The planning of places is a complex matter: it involves the messy business of the human condition. Art has a major role to play in opening the door to creating the sorts of places that people want to live in. It is vital in helping us to both understand and express what it is to be human, and people need art in their everyday lives to thrive and to connect. So, for very practical reasons it is central to successful place-making, whether it concerns regeneration, the creation of a new community, the development of new infrastructure, or the economic contribution of the creative industries.

If we ignore the role that art plays in our wider cultural identity we end up with, for example, poor-quality new housing, a lack of trust between people and decision-makers, and an inability to offer solutions to key problems such as the reinvention of our town centres. Similarly, if we ignore the role that art plays in our economies, local and national, we miss an opportunity to harness one of the country's most important industries and drivers of growth.

This guide is intended to help put art back into the process and outcomes of planning, in the hope that this can transform the kinds of places that we make. Building on the deep connection between the Garden Cities and Arts and Crafts movements, it sets out some guiding principles and some recommendations on implementation. It also outlines a set of case studies that offer insights into the outcomes possible from the fusion of art and planning.

Putting art into planning is much more than just a matter of adding the right policy into a Local Plan: it requires a wider corporate commitment to the arts and some risk-taking. But the results can be dramatic, from the mural that puts a smile on someone's face to supporting economic transformation and helping people to engage in decision-making.

## Section 1

# Introduction

There is clear evidence that the way we organise places can impact on people's life chances: their mental and physical wellbeing are shaped by the homes and neighbourhoods that they live in.<sup>1</sup> Planning is therefore important for our future.

For the TCPA, planning is not simply concerned with land use. It is about asking the defining question of a civilised society: how are we going to live? Given the scope of this question, it is not surprising that planners have often made mistakes, but planning's past record is nevertheless impressive. From places such as Bournville and Letchworth Garden City to millions of generously built and high-quality council homes, successful planning has been directly linked to a humane and explicitly artistic approach. But today art is all too often stripped out of planning. Local Plans are often silent about art, with art itself restricted to sites at the centre of roundabouts. There are some brilliant exceptions to this rule, but if experiencing and participating in art is a vital part of securing people's wellbeing, there is no doubt that we need to do much better.

There has been renewed government interest in 'beauty' in the built environment, expressed through design codes. The commitment to better design is welcome, but embedding art in planning remains a more ambitious idea. Codifying what central government believes to be 'good design' might stop the worst from happening, but it can also squash creative and diverse solutions. In any event, art's contribution to making places is about much more than just physical design outcomes: it is about a process of co-creation and collaboration between communities, artists, and planners.

### Note

- 1 See, for example, the *Putting Health into Place* suite of publications, produced by the TCPA, The King's Fund, The Young Foundation, and Public Health England, for NHS England (NHS England, Sept. 2019). <https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/innovation/healthy-new-towns/>



Homes at Bournville and Letchworth

## Artists and planners

On the whole, artists and planners inhabit different worlds and speak different languages. Successful collaborations between artists and planners have so far been rare. But the prize of reconnecting planning with art is nothing less than putting the soul and spirit back into the places that we make. Art can do this by creating space for people to express feelings about their environment. This means engaging with the messy world of emotions, affection, and contested identities.

Thinking artistically about planning involves putting the full breadth of the human experience at the heart of planning so that it speaks to that part of the human spirit which is so hard to define but so essential to a satisfying life. Putting art into planning requires us to think about how it can be enabled through physical assets (such as theatres, cinemas, galleries, space for festivals and installations, and wider landscapes); but it also requires us to enhance and facilitate the development of art's non-physical aspects (i.e. an area or community's shared memory, experiences, identity, heritage, inclusivity, learning, and creativity).

### Super Slow Way

**The Super Slow Way is an arts commissioning programme exploring themes pertinent to the area around the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, and is shaped by 'local communities working alongside a wide range of local, national and international artists and producers'. An initial £2 million in funding granted under Arts Council England's Creative People and Places programme was followed by a further £1 million grant from the same source for a second phase in 2018-2021. The Super Slow Way multi-partnership project is led by the Canal & River Trust.**

Further information is available from <http://superslowway.org.uk/>

## A lesson from history

The founders of the planning and Garden City movements often referred to what they did as 'Civic Art' – by which they meant shaping and designing buildings and spaces, parks and gardens to achieve something that was not simply efficient in engineering terms but also beautiful and a source of delight. In their view, the scope of Civic Art was broad, if bounded by the spaces shared as a community or among friends and family.

Civic Art applied important principles which form the basis of the approach outlined in this guide. For example, art should be available for everyone – to experience and create – in their everyday lives. And to ensure that design was not thrust upon the community but instead emerged from it, dialogue and co-creation were crucial parts of Civic Art.

This strand of ideas was core to Colin Ward's anarchist attempt to promote collaboration between planners, architects and communities, but with communities in the driving seat. The concept of co-creation was also linked to the vital role of craft and meaningful creative work.



James Smith

*Contrapuntal Forms*, by Barbara Hepworth, at its Harlow site

Beauty was seen as partly derived from the knowledge, skill and pleasure that went into making things. It is interesting that, of all the components of good Civic Art, it is the notion of craft and care for what is produced and who produced it that is the most difficult and perhaps most important to pursue in an era when meaningful human work is under renewed threat.

In short, Civic Art was a philosophy – a way of thinking which played a critical role in humanising and balancing the other technical aspects of planning.

Our current system has become dominated by technical questions, and, necessary though the technical disciplines are, they often crowd out the most important issue: sensitivity to the human condition.

### A difference between art and culture?

There are no strict boundaries between what we mean here by art and our definition of culture. In this guide we see culture as a wider ecosystem of social characteristics which include ethnic diversity, art, sport, heritage, the character of business, and the nature of local politics. Art has a key role to play in that wider cultural richness. Art itself has no single definition, but is related to how humans express their emotional and creative characteristics. It can be experienced through the joy of creation or through ‘consuming’ the art of others, in a variety of media and in diverse formal and informal contexts. Like anything else in life, artistic projects can have outcomes ranging from spectacular success to rank failure.

### The aim of this guide



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**This guide provides a broad overview of the opportunities to reunite art and planning, and of how such opportunities can be delivered through practical action. It puts forward a set of principles to guide the development of an arts strategy and specific recommendations on the components of a successful strategic approach. It touches on the benefits of an arts strategy for place-making and gives examples of how art has been used in the wider development process.**

## Section 2

# Civic Art – making it happen

### Can you plan for art?

Art excites, stimulates, provokes and entertains people. But art needs to be enabled: we need to ensure that there are venues and places to experience art and that people can participate directly in artistic activities. Civic Art is not limited to any specific media – it can be as much about the visual arts as it can be about people writing stories or making films, dance and theatre about their places. Critically for how we plan, this means we need to embed art in the design of the civic spaces that we all share, from a city centre to a village green.

Planning can play multiple roles in encouraging the arts, from provoking engagement and communicating choices, and making space for formal and informal artistic activities, to the overall design of places which stimulate and delight. But we should not mistake 'planning for art' for some kind of authoritarian 'art plan'. We must try to enable and stimulate, but what people do with their artistic spaces will always be a matter of debate. In fact, part of the essence of the arts is how they evolve to colonise unexpected territory. And some of the very best examples of how art has empowered and regenerated existing communities, often

while challenging formal planning processes, have been defined by their anarchic use of spaces.

The flowering of informal clubs and galleries in Berlin after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was not planned but was enabled by the extraordinary availability of unused buildings and open space. In places such as Hackney Wick in London, regeneration projects threaten to push the artistic community out of the area if suitable affordable spaces are not provided in redevelopment plans. Art cannot always be planned, but it can be brilliantly enabled – for example, through the planning process. Those preparing plans and strategies must be willing to take risks with culture and the arts, which calls for leadership and understanding.

### The key benefits of developing a Civic Art strategy

The benefits to be gained from a Civic Art strategy can be considered under three headings:

- **Physical and psychological health and wellbeing:** Art in the public realm is an important factor in generating collective wellbeing and a sense of place and belonging. And the participatory arts offer opportunities to build meaningful social engagement, while



## Folkestone Triennial

Thierry Bal



Gabriel Lester's 'Electrified line', commissioned by Creative Folkestone for Folkestone Triennial 2014

Every three years since 2008, artists have been invited to Folkestone to use the town as their gallery, utilising public spaces to create striking new art that reflects issues affecting both the town and the wider world. Four such 'Folkestone Triennials', led by arts charity Creative Folkestone, have taken place, attracting more than 440,000 visitors in total. The Folkestone Triennials are supported by founding funder The Roger De Haan Charitable Trust, and by Arts Council England, Kent County Council, and Folkestone & Hythe District Council.

Further information is available from

<https://www.creativefolkestone.org.uk/folkestone-triennial/about/>

participation in sport, for example, is important to physical wellbeing and in tackling health issues. Involvement in cultural and sporting activities can enable people who would otherwise be excluded to enter into the life of the community.

- **Economic success:** There is a wide range of evidence demonstrating the links between a

rich artistic and cultural offer and economic success, and all over the world major cities are using culture as a catalyst for change. Across the UK, at least £856 million per annum of spending by tourists visiting the UK can be attributed directly to arts and culture.<sup>2</sup> Places that are beautiful and green and have a rich cultural life are far more likely to attract

#### Note

- <sup>2</sup> *The Contribution of the Arts and Culture to the National Economy*. Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr), for Arts Council England, May 2013. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/contribution-arts-and-culture-national%2%A0economy>

and sustain businesses. And involvement in the arts can be a stepping stone into a career in the cultural industries – which are worth £10.8 billion a year to UK economy.<sup>3</sup>

- **Place identity:** Whether they are inspired by the area's landscape and history or they devise new events or traditions, designers, artists, performers and other creative people can help in forming the character and distinctiveness of a place, which in turn helps to make places in which people (not least young people) want to live and work. Creating a sense of identity, place, ownership and belonging are among the significant benefits that the arts can bring to a community and its environment.

## Key principles of Civic Art

Even if we acknowledge art's power and potential to make people's lives richer, we still need to be clear about the necessary guiding principles underpinning a successful approach.

The arts should not be regarded as simply facets of local life that are 'nice to have'. All communities need access to a rich and wide cultural offer, from football to ballet and everything in between, and the guiding principles set out here are designed to avoid the promotion of arts becoming part of local 'culture wars': the arts are not an elite pastime. The principles are also designed to avoid 'art washing', where artists are used as a convenient marketing tool for particular developments.

For the TCPA, four principles are particularly important:

- Civic Art is rooted in social justice, and what we create must be available to all of us in our everyday lives. As a result, Civic Art can be

challenging and controversial, but it must always be useful. It must not be used solely to beautify a place or become a means of 'art washing'.

- Civic Art is the product of processes of co-creation and co-operation with communities. Artists and planners can inspire, convene, help and inform, but should never seek to impose their will.
- Civic Art involves risk-taking and being willing to make mistakes – it should not be controlling or afraid of genuine debate.
- Civic Art initiatives should seize the opportunity to support meaningful and creative work and learning through the co-production and crafting of homes, buildings, spaces, and artworks. There should be a clear fit with other strategies on skills and public health objectives such as reducing loneliness.

## Key components of a successful planning and arts strategy

If it is to be successful, Civic Art needs to be embedded as a wider corporate priority that has the active support of both political leaders and senior management. Corporate strategy should outline the role of the arts as a key tool to be used in meeting other corporate objectives on planning, regeneration, health, and public engagement, and in delivery in matters ranging from social prescribing to economic resilience.<sup>4</sup> Corporate strategy should also recognise the opportunity for partnership working with formal and informal arts organisations across of number of sectors.

There are numerous examples of local authorities adopting arts strategies, but the planning process is not often seen as a means of delivery. The reality is that pressures of securing a five-year land supply for housing delivery have squashed many creative policies. However, there is nothing

### Notes

3 *Contribution of the Arts and Culture Industry to the UK Economy*. Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr), for Arts Council England, Apr. 2019. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/contribution-arts-and-culture-industry-uk-economy-0>

4 See, for example, *Arts Development Strategy 2018-2023*. Guildford Borough Council (undated). [https://www.guildford.gov.uk/media/27241/Arts-Development-strategy/pdf/Final\\_web\\_PDF\\_Arts\\_Development\\_Strategy\\_A4\\_36pp\\_Low\\_Res.pdf?m=63657138388910000](https://www.guildford.gov.uk/media/27241/Arts-Development-strategy/pdf/Final_web_PDF_Arts_Development_Strategy_A4_36pp_Low_Res.pdf?m=63657138388910000)

to prevent the pursuit of an ambitious arts policy as long as it is justified in terms of its benefits and is deliverable in terms of viability. There are four elements to consider when embedding Civic Art within local planning:

- **Embedding art in the process of plan-making:** The case studies set out in this document illustrate what a powerful tool art can be in supporting public debate and participation in the plan-making process. To increase their chances of success, art-based approaches should be embedded at the beginning of the project planning process, and should be clearly programmed to support the earliest stages of the plan-making process.
- **Detailed policy in Local Plans:** To give certainty to the community and developers, particularly over land prices, it is important that policy in Local Plans is precise and deliverable. Vague commitments to the arts as ‘nice to have’ options are not useful. There are a wide range of policies that can be adopted in Local Plans related to Section 106 funding requirements, requirements for public art, and (perhaps most importantly) the design of civic space to offer flexible opportunities for diverse artistic activities – ranging from very small sites for street artists to the layout of public green space to allow its use for festivals and performances. Masterplanning new development or town centre renewal offers opportunities for detailed policy.
- **Funding:** In times of severe austerity there might well be understandable scepticism within local government about how a planning and arts strategy can be paid for. Resources will be difficult to secure, but the starting point for success lies in corporate and community ambition. ‘Percent for art’ and Section 106 agreements are established ways of securing funding but are limited by the overall viability

of schemes, particularly in areas of low demand for development. Changes to guidance on viability testing set out in Planning Policy Guidance<sup>5</sup> demonstrate the importance of clearly expressed and detailed policy requirements, which can then be reflected in lower land prices. But success will also depend on identifying new funding partnerships or on supporting community groups and artists in successful funding bids. The case studies set out in this document cover different aspects of the deployment of art projects in planning and give outlines of particular funding. Details of potential funding sources are provided in the final section of this guide.

- **Stewardship:** Creating opportunities for art requires a long-term approach to managing community development and spaces. As for many other aspects of successful place-making, this requires a stewardship body. The TCPA has provided extensive guidance on how to approach stewardship,<sup>6</sup> and places such as Harlow or Letchworth Garden City provide examples of how local bodies can play a leading role in securing the long-term artistic assets and strengths of a place.

A successful planning and arts strategy should be flexible enough to respond to local circumstances.

There are many different ways of using the arts in development, and the next section of this guide provides examples of three types of approach. The first two examples use art to stimulate community debate on the choices facing an area. The second pair of examples use art to help sustain or re-imagine the identity of places. The final example illustrates how community control of space for the arts can be secured over the long term. Some of the actions highlighted were part of the formal planning process, while others were initiatives that fed into wider debates on

#### Notes

- 5 ‘Viability’. *Planning Policy Guidance*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, updated Sept. 2019. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/viability>
- 6 See, for example, *Built Today, Treasured Tomorrow – A Good Practice Guide to Long-Term Stewardship*. TCPA, Jan. 2014. <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/practical-guide-to-long-term-stewardship>; and *Guide 9: Long-Term Stewardship*. Practical Guides for Creating Successful New Communities. TCPA, Dec. 2017. <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/tcpa-pgs-guide-9-stewardship>

## Section 3

# Case studies

### ***Art as a tool for public participation in decision-making***

#### ***The Town Meeting***

*The Town Meeting* is a theatre performance in which the audience itself is asked to play the role of a community facing a major planning decision, provoking them to think about the consequences of that decision. The play originated as a project

exploring how theatre can be used to engage communities in planning, for the benefit of both the community and planners. The project was undertaken by Cap-a-Pie, a theatre company that focuses on community and education projects, and Dr Paul Cowie, Research Fellow at Newcastle University. The play has been performed in many community theatre venues since 2014 and has demonstrated the value of performance and art within planning engagement.



Northumberland CIO

Performance of *The Town Meeting*

In autumn 2016, Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA) worked with the project team in workshops based on *The Town Meeting*, held to engage members of local communities in the review of the NNPA's Local Plan. The workshops enabled NNPA planners to gain insight into issues of importance to local communities, and helped to bring the local community and planners together. *The Town Meeting* workshop was subsequently used by a local community to start creating a Neighbourhood Plan. The report on the 'Issues and Options' for the NNPA's Local Plan created by the workshop formed part of the final plan itself. This creative method of involvement has helped to generate interest and enthusiasm for engagement in planning.

Further information is available from <https://www.cap-a-pie.co.uk/the-town-meeting/>

### **Shorelines Project, Hull**

The Shorelines Project is a community-led initiative set up by Rights : Community : Action, a coalition of practitioners addressing the climate emergency, 'with and for people, and the environment'. The city-wide, 18-month campaigning project is being delivered by Hull creative agency Drunk Animal, led by artist Calvin Innes, and will see giant murals pop up across the city as a reminder of the climate risks that it faces – most notably that Hull faces a flooded future if nothing is done. It aims to use community-led art to enable residents to have a better understanding of the climate-related risks that their city faces, and so change Hull's future.

The Shorelines Project focuses on involving people in a variety of ways, from offering wall space, to getting people involved in painting the murals or joining online webinars discussing the city's future. The practitioners within the project use art to entice Hull's citizens to start a conversation about the climate emergency, which can feel impenetrable. The aim is to unpick the issues and help to deliver answers in a way that resonates with all.

Further information is available from <https://theshorelinesproject.com/> and <https://rightscommunityaction.co.uk/>

## ***The art of renewing places***

### **Newington Big Local, Ramsgate**

Newington Big Local is a resident-led partnership set up in the estate of Newington in Ramsgate, Kent. Largely built in the 1950s, Newington has scored 'highly' in deprivation indices and was recently ranked in the top 10% of places lacking public assets and local spaces, but nevertheless enjoys a strong sense of community spirit. In 2014 Newington Big Local was awarded £1 million by the Big Lottery Fund. The funds are managed by a team of residents and have been used to improve the estate through a range of community projects, including children's holiday activities and regular events, managing a small woodland ('The Copse'), setting up a community food club, and a community chef project, aimed at healthy eating.

The partnership often uses art and creativity to involve residents in a variety of ways, aided by two artists-in-residence. In 2019, it received £200,000 from the Local Trust's Create Civic Change programme, which was used to help reclaim green spaces for the local community, involving residents in the creation of a sensory garden, exploring place-making through planting, and undertaking other creative activities such as cladding concrete benches with mosaics created by residents. The partnership runs a youth club and holds free weekly art and crafts activities for Newington children. During the first COVID-19 lockdown creativity packs filled with art materials were sent to families. Since 2015, Newington Big Local has organised its annual Best Fest arts festival, which hosts local groups and organisations that work to make the community a better place in which to live.

Further information is available from <https://www.renewington.com/>

### **The Stove Network, Dumfries**

The Stove Network (The Stove) is an arts and community organisation in Dumfries, Scotland. It operates from premises in the town's high street that serve as a café, a meeting place, and an arts

venue for a diverse programme of initiatives, including music, literature, painting, public art, film, theatre, and town planning, architecture and design activities. The Stove uses art and creativity to nurture education and to bring life to the town centre – and sees the arts ‘not as something solely for an ‘arts audience’ but rather as a vital contribution to society on all fronts’.

The Stove operates under a mixture of income sources, both public and private, from the café, and from renting space to other organisations. All the income is then injected into meeting its charitable objectives. It was also granted £100,000 per year from Creative Scotland, fixed for three years beginning in April 2018, to go towards running costs and programme delivery. It leases its high street premises from Dumfries & Galloway Council, at a nominal £1 per year, fixed for 25 years.

The Stove hosts a wide variety of ongoing initiatives, including:

- The Artists and Community Landowners project – ‘telling the stories of Scotland’s land in the hands of local people’ – creatively explores the stories of community landownership across Scotland and its impacts on local people, their identity, decision-making and the economy, and social and community benefits.
- The Embers project aims to ignite creative and culturally led regeneration by exploring the experience of community-led place-making in Dumfries & Galloway and by helping to define a joined-up vision for future work.
- Creative Futures is a National Lottery funded project that aims to bring together people in the Lochside and Lincluden areas of North West Dumfries to develop their creative talents and so enable them to have a bigger voice within their local community and bring new creative opportunities into the area.

Other activities pursued by The Stove include ‘open mic’ nights, a yearly festival celebrating the town and the River Nith, and displays and exhibitions celebrating the arts in the built environment.

Further information is available from <https://thestove.org/>

## *Stewardship for the arts*

### **Harlow Art Trust**

Harlow Art Trust (HAT) is a charity founded in 1953 to commission and protect public sculptures in Harlow. It has acquired works by up-and-coming sculptors and assisted them by providing a permanent, public exhibition of their works. Today, a collection of 100 sculptures of national significance, and for which HAT is responsible, is sited throughout the New Town of Harlow.

HAT was set up by Harlow New Town’s lead architect-planner, Frederick Gibberd, who wanted it to be a place where people who might not normally have access to art could enjoy sculptures made by great artists at every turn. Consequently, much of Harlow’s sculpture collection is in the town’s public spaces, accessible to all.

True to its pioneering ethos, Harlow has a diverse and unique range of arts, cultural and heritage assets. In 2010 it rebranded itself as ‘Harlow Sculpture Town’ in recognition of the town’s publicly accessible sculpture collection, and to celebrate, in addition to sculptures owned by HAT, other sculpture collections in Harlow, including those owned by Harlow Council and works at the Gibberd Garden and Parndon Mill.

In 2018, HAT won a grant of £55,300 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to launch a volunteer scheme and restore sculptures in urgent need of care. The grant also enabled HAT to lead the ‘Access Harlow Sculpture Town’ project, aimed at protecting the collection and engaging people of all ages. HAT also set up a team of volunteer ‘Sculpture Guardians’, training them in conservation techniques and enabling them to lead tours for locals and visitors. In 2020, HAT launched a new website and digital map, making the public artworks more accessible than ever.

Further information is available from <http://www.gibberdgallery.co.uk/index.php/home/who-we-are>

## Section 4

# Funding sources

Securing funding for the arts can be very challenging. As discussed above, Section 106 contributions offer one route, but competing pressures on such funding are such that in very many cases they are unlikely to provide the necessary level of investment. There are three other principal sources of funding:

- direct grants from the three government-backed arts agencies in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland;
- direct grants from a range of charitable trusts and foundations that support the arts; and
- finance from business.

Arts Council England, Creative Scotland, Arts Wales and Arts Council of Northern Ireland each provide useful information about the funding that they offer and links to other funding sources – see, respectively:

- <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding> and <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/other-sources-funding#section-1>
- <https://www.creativescotland.com/funding>
- <https://arts.wales/funding>
- <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/>

## Next steps

The TCPA aims to help put the passion and inspiration of artistic practice back at the heart of the planning process. We have published an arts strategy that will form the basis of a much wider conversation with planners, artists, and local communities. We have also worked with the arts and community development organisation Northern Heartlands to develop a network for artist and planners called Re:Place. For more information on the work of the network, see <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/replace>

The TCPA's arts strategy is available from the TCPA's 'Art and Planning' webpage along with further information and resources – see <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/category/art-and-planning>

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