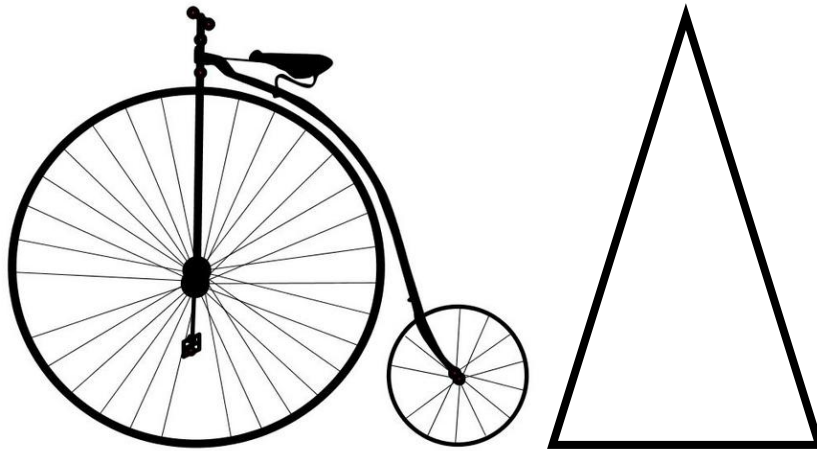


maindee

a hub, some spokes and a triangle: places for action



Introduction

V&O is a collaboration between visual artist Pandora Vaughan and architect Huw Meredydd Owen, working in a cross-disciplinary way on the creation and re-invention of mainly public environments. We met whilst studying for an MA in Art in Architecture, in 2000, and our approach covers a broad range of spatial intervention and interpretations in both landscape and architectural contexts. We share a love of surprise and self-directed adventure, and treat every new site or project with the starting question - how can we make this fun, dynamic and full of reflective beauty?

The work that we do involves exploring and creating places; the emphasis is very much on the way people use a space and its elements. Central to that process, is an appreciation of the social and cultural context and finding the life in its surroundings. Pandora has a background in landscape architecture and an interest in permaculture design principles, so that if it is an external site, we usually try to see if it can be useful for sustenance of both mind and spirit as well as possibly edible.

Huw has experience of working on community led projects of many types, analysing needs, feasibility, practical issues as well as using creative design to further the intentions of various kinds of organisations, as well as to help them realise goals and increase capacity.

We have been asked to :

1. share our **impressions** of the character of the neighbourhood especially in the context of the work of Maindee Unlimited
2. to establish some **principles** for the use of art in the regeneration of Maindee
3. to propose a direction for **proposals** for key actions and locations

Maindee - impressions

Based on visits and the participation events we see the following as the main features in the public realm that can be developed as part of an arts regeneration strategy.

- ☼ generally the way traffic uses the area is the biggest contributor to a sense of too much pollution and of being 'somewhere to pass through'. There is very little public tree or other planting to ameliorate the hard tarmac & exhaust everywhere. Some improvements have been attempted, but the width of Chepstow Road, for example, militates against a pedestrian friendly zone between Livingstone Place and the Banc junction, despite the main through route now having been diverted to Corporation Road

- ☼ with the George Street road bridge and the railway bridges overhead there is a sense of being surrounded on all sides by transport infrastructure - big, loud, passing by, which in turn leaves a sense of insignificance or smallness - powerlessness. It would be ideal to improve the sense of ownership of public spaces - especially the less obvious ones like linear bits of tarmac and car park verges, removing unnecessary boundaries to free movement; improving cycling facilities would help create a cohesive geographical area.
- ☼ the density of housing in the area is high, due to houses in multiple ownership, flats, extended families and the pressure of the economy on new housing; the density is getting back to Victorian levels, and should therefore make for a more viable local economy, as well as increased street encounters and less car use; again circumstances to increased short distance bicycle use; it is significant that Gwent Police have recently reopened the police station and regularly use bicycles to patrol the area
- ☼ Maindee has been in a state of change ever since it was developed in 1850s - what is it that is constant in this change - that can be built upon / revealed / 'mined' to provide the contemporary community with greater confidence, which equals greater effective community action, which in turn leads to effective regeneration
- ☼ food is a regular feature of the area, reflecting the character of the community, but also being associated with quality and authenticity
- ☼ a lack of public open spaces is testimony to the incremental development of the area, which eventually saw the development of parks in squares and the larger Woodland Park to the SE; streets generally are broad and there are many left over corners, as well as broad verges to some roads; these are proto-public spaces and could be used in practical as well as creative ways
- ☼ architecturally the area is largely dominated by a mid-century Victorian, domestic scale, and punctuated by slightly larger public buildings of some character, though now many (particularly pubs) are unused and awaiting conversion to flats; there are some early twentieth century buildings of some character as well (Maindee Pool, and the remnants of the cinema in a muscular Odeon style)
- ☼ from the participative consultation, the area seems pretty cohesive socially, with the usual series of deficiencies common to peripheral city centre localities, but also possessing a strong identity of place

Ideas for projects are forming around a combination of process led landscape improvements and events.

Principles

The use of art in the regeneration of Maindee centres on how to channel what is often called 'socially engaged' art towards a wider goal of shared confidence and community capacity. The context is set out by the IPP introductory guidance:

Through *Ideas : People : Places* we will invest in a small number of exemplary projects that genuinely seek to test **new models** of regeneration and collaboration through the arts. We want to explore new ways of working, nurture new partnerships, and champion **quality** in both the design and the execution of projects. Successful projects will, we expect, be those that adopt a **thoughtful** and **creative** approach to regeneration – an approach that **connects** and **empowers** communities, seeing them as important **contributors** to the regeneration process.

IPP guidance 2010

There is a range of art that is relevant to this type of circumstance. At one end, a participatory event that is highly social and in that sense has its uses, but can be tangential to the overall approach. At the other end of the range is the well meaning act that makes a superficial

improvement (commonly found towards the end of financial years). Between the two is the direction that should be pursued in the interest of meaningful creative acts that are of high quality, that are significant to those who were part of their creation and whose result makes all the more effective the other actions of the regeneration strategy.

One important point might also be added at this stage: much attention is given to youth deprivation and lack of opportunity, but a principle that should be developed in this strategy is the similar problems and lack of opportunity suffered by older people, and that one of the keys to making a meaningful future for Maindee is to use their experience and knowledge, thereby also strengthening social cohesion.

So how is this an arts led strategy? The arts, generally, have moved on from a traditional 'beaux-arts' dedication to beauty and prettiness, and can be used strategically by us in several main areas, as the detailed proposals for action are evaluated and developed.

IN recent decades artists have progressively expanded the boundaries of art as they have sought to engage with an increasingly pluralistic environment. Teaching, curating and understanding art and visual culture are likewise no longer grounded in traditional aesthetics but centred on significant ideas, topics and themes ranging from the everyday to the uncanny, the psychoanalytical to the political.

Iwona Blazwick

General introduction to "Documents of Contemporary Art' Whitechapel Gallery 2009

To engage with both individuals and the wider community as part of **their** reality, to use their **experience** of the creative process as the basis of increased community capacity, and to emphasise the locations as **places for action**.

Public Art, it has been alleged, is neither 'public' nor 'art'. It became eroded into a formulaic process with only patchy success. In empowering communities, many actions are measurable, but those that really count are often subjective or transitory and depend on a long term strategy whose very longevity militates against them as they become prey to budgetary limitations and interference. Art in the public realm reinforces wider long term strategy and provides the generative frame within which other activities can gain an identity. It is of the community, is influenced by the community is made relevant by that community.

Creative placemaking takes into account the many aspects of 'place' that give a location a narrative and a dynamic. It is about roots as well as routes, the fourth dimension and the sixth sense.

new babylonians ...

Without the passivity of tourists, but fully aware of the power they have to act upon the world, to transform it, to recreate it... 'new means' ... Just like the painter, who with a mere handful of colours creates an infinite variety of forms, contrasts and styles, the new Babylonians can endlessly vary their environment, renew and vary it by using their technical implements. This comparison reveals a fundamental difference between the two ways of creating. The painter is a solitary creator who is only confronted by another person's reaction once the creative act is over. Among the New Babylonians, on the other hand, the creative act is also a social act; as a direct intervention in the social world, it elicits an immediate response... And it is only much later when the work acquires an undeniable reality, that it will have to confront society."

Constant Nieuwenhuys, 'New Babylon' Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1974

Outlook and potential - direction for proposals

The direct areas of action of the strategy is in increasing the confidence of the community in itself, its sense of ownership of the neighbourhood and the increased capacity that is brought about by that to the locality, in social awareness, economic activity and wellbeing.

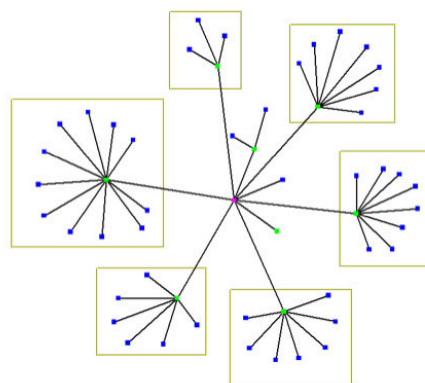
The arts are to be interpreted broadly, and since the area already hosts the well established Maindee Festival, the strategy already has a pattern of engagement to build upon. The strategy also benefits from the involvement of performance practitioners, Mr. & Mrs. Clark, who are experienced in creative community engagement, and whose involvement will do much to further establish the dynamic nature of this strategy. The placemaking proposals will then become the locations for action.

In physical terms, the centre of the area is Chepstow Road between the junction (at the eastern end) with Wharf Road, and the railway bridge at the western end. The island site, as well as the car park on the site of the former school and the proto-square at the Banc pub are its main nodes. The first proposals, should, therefore, emphasise this area as a hub for the locality, in practical terms as a physical identity and gathering place, but also conceptually as a means of identifying the area.

The strategy also envisages a recurring involvement of engagement along the lines of the annual parade and street events, so that here is an efficient direct channel of communication between the community and those involved in the creative interventions. Annual events are paradoxically similar and contrasting, something that might have been said of the waves of population that have inhabited Maindee since its earliest days.

The proposals below should lead on to more confident and wider-reaching actions developed in a sustainable way by this strategy to begin with, but increasingly by a wider group of active participants over time. Attention should be given to how this should most effectively occur, but the pattern of a central catalyst attracting a group of active volunteers, that eventually become autonomous, would be a good one to follow, as it, indeed, does already in the area. Artists would be brought in either as the central agent or as a means for giving the activity a constructive direction.

Largely these activities will arise from practical issues raised by the community, but from time to time a broader overview should be commissioned from an artist as a form of creative feedback to the central strategy.



Actions

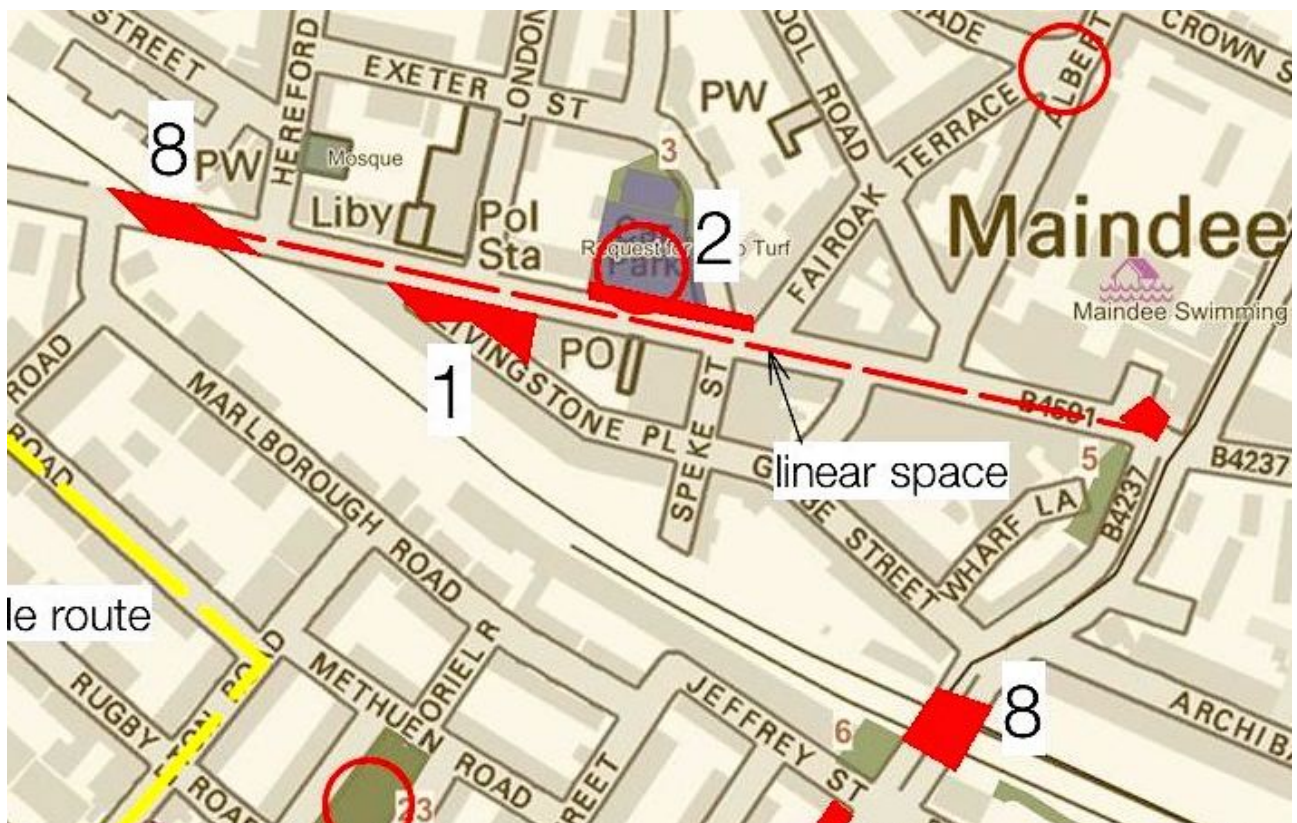
The proposals for creative actions is something that needs to be developed incrementally as the patterns for actions are established and refined for a further iteration of the project. It also needs to be undertaken by a range of creative individuals and groups that have skills and ideas suited to the different areas of action.

The Hub and the Triangle: Central to the strategy is the need to provide a 'hub' for the actions that will follow, being able to prominently house a range of activities that relate to the strategy, but

importantly to evoke the sense of pride, confidence and shared activity that is at the core of the approach. Visually it needs to link in to other creative elements, and in terms of urban design provide a functional focus to the pattern of use across the neighbourhood, and to gather people, to make them welcome and to offer new skills in a creative context.



In practical terms the main location for these efforts would probably best be concentrated on the Triangle site. In loose terms, the (triangular) site is at the western end of the central area of Chepstow Street, across the road to the police station and library, and is formed by the (now closed) junction with Livingstone Place. Set across the site is a substantial toilet building, in front



of which is a partially enclosed grassed area and mature trees and hedges, with raised brick planters and dividing walls.

The location is well suited to being the focus of a hub area due to its high visibility along Chepstow Road, its central location and ease of access from a significant number of streets, the available area and the potential for reclaiming traffic dominated adjoining areas (e.g. by narrowing Chepstow Road and extending a new paved surface over the immediate area adjoining the island). The site should also house an extremely well designed and complex bit of climbing / play equipment.

It should be emphasised that the creative process would explore the significance of the whole of the linear hub area in terms of denoting an awareness of place as well as its functional use, and especially in the context of all the areas of interest of the strategy.



The scope for making a useful and practical space (for that is essential to the strategy, rather than a construction that only has visual appeal) is good. The hub's design needs to be of high quality, inventive, creative and original, developed in conjunction with the people it will serve. **Perfunctory bits of leftover this or that will not do the job.**

Uses should be mainly in support of the strategy, so can house making, talking, and showing activities, as well as being a convenient drop-in place. It should have sufficient flexibility to be used increasingly as the strategy evolves, with linkage to the 'spokes' being maintained by direct connection, usage and also visual themes (e.g. underbridge sites, street furniture, signage having a code of colours and forms, particular to their sites but making reference to locations across the neighbourhood, developed by the artists and the people involved)

Costs

(now covered in the main report)

Spokes

The 'spoke' projects can be defined by location, theme, interest group and by the action required. We suggest the following as a pattern:

- ☼ **What Hides Under the Bridges?** making and bringing stories to life Wildlife of Maindee - who lives here alongside you? (artists, materials, facilitation - range £8k - 12k)
- ☼ **Gardens in the sky**, ties in with the bridges overhead perhaps: raised permanent planters - not hanging baskets - located on main streets, prominent locations and using lamp posts, possibly (landscape artists, maker, materials, facilitation - range £10k - £40k)

☼ **Temperance and Trades** - history through textiles - making and designing banners for parades, etc. (artist, materials, facilitation - range £15k - £50k)

☼ **Food for Free** - grow your own on the streets, a streetscape planting project 'An Orchard for Maindee? Banc planter Wharf Rd verges (landscape artist, ecologist, construction/ land preparation costs - range £10k - £100k)



☼ **Moveable feast:** a place on wheels, tying into the Triangle themes and uses, but relocatable - popping up wherever required; constructed using bicycle technology - cost range £12k -



£20k)

- ☼ **Playground** devised by children (artist, facilitation, fabrication costs - range £50k - £150k)
- ☼ **Invisible Maindee** - where are its walls and gates, and why? exploration of pathways, routes, connections - feeding into other projects and also producing an output of its own (dependent upon artist) - cost range £15k - £25k
- ☼ **Process based projects:** less visual but projects where the engagement process is seen as the art itself using the billboards as a potential project; shops and shopfronts (pop-ups) sewing/ sowing/ sawing /swinging - cost range £10k - £100k



- ☼ **Pocket art parks** - street furniture and features to articulate the spatial orientation, introduce greater opportunities for street encounter and sociability, and be projects that lead on to

others that are connected (arts, facilitation, fabrication - range £20k - £200k

- ✿ **Performance:** participative events based on performance / music / dance / procession / building on the annual parade/ beating the bounds
- ✿ **Broader overview** commission - in order to recapitulate the strategy but to take account of its progress: this should be used as a means of assessing the progress of the strategy - cost range £20k - 30k

Each of these suggestions would form constituent parts of the four main areas of activity, namely :

- Mappa Maindee
- Street Media
- New Paths
- Public Space

Summary

- ✿ The project to be based on a continuation of the mature engagement developed by Maindee Festival and the range of other community activities already established
- ✿ Process based creative practice to focus on the conversation
- ✿ The significance of activities gauged by the community
- ✿ Actions seek an exploration of the context, with focus on specific areas of practical interests.
- ✿ The strategy to holistically benefit from promoting a central focus to the neighbourhood, defined by its centre
- ✿ Much of the art process is dedicated to making **places for action**.



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