

**Creative Folkestone Annual Report 2020/21
For Folkestone and Hythe District Council**



The Plinth Project and Banksy's Art Buff, The Old High Street

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Introduction

This report informs Folkestone and Hythe District Council (FHDC) of the progress made by Creative Folkestone following the award of a 3-year grant starting on 1 April 2018. The annual awarded amount is £25,000 and this report covers the achievements made in the third year from April 2020 to March 2021.

The funding has been granted subject to Creative Folkestone meeting the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Grant Agreement signed on 1 May 2018. The report refers in detail to the *Key Performance Indicators* set by FHDC (Table 1) which align well with the strategic goals of Creative Folkestone (Appendix A).

Table 1: Goals and Key Performance Indicators listed in the Grant Agreement

Goal	Key Performance Indicator
1: Creatively engage with the people of Folkestone.	1A: Increase the number of people attending the Venue and engaging with the Recipient
	1B: Increase the number of art events and engagement events held
2: Enhance the look and appearance of the Creative Quarter area of Folkestone	2A: Increase the number of people visiting the Creative Quarter
3: Enhance the economy of Folkestone town centre	3A: Increase the level of occupancy of commercial space
4: Enhance the reputation of Folkestone as a 'creative' destination.	4A: Increase traffic and hits on the Recipient's site
5: Create a sustainable Creative Folkestone	5A: Achieve balanced financial accounts for the Venue
	5B: Secure alternative funding to replace the Council's contribution by the end of the grant period

Summary of the year

Throughout the whole year, and in common with all performance venues, the Coronavirus pandemic had a significant impact on the planning of our creative programme and demanded flexibility and adaptation in the way we delivered events and other activities.

Following the restrictions imposed due to Covid-19 in March 2020, we were forced to cancel and postpone our programme of live events, festivals and community activities in Quarterhouse and swiftly pivoted programming, communications and marketing to a more digital output. We continued to communicate with our audiences via social media, website and newsletters with a focus on supporting the creative community, sharing opportunities for support, funding and online activity such as virtual book clubs, film screenings, documentary screenings, comedy performances and educational activities.

At the beginning of autumn, and with restrictions eased, our activities gained further momentum. One of the highlights was the opening of *The Plinth* project on Friday 17 September; a project whose development has been inspired by the return of a well-known artwork to the Creative Quarter. *Art Buff*, painted by the street artist Banksy, was reinstalled in Folkestone's Old High Street bringing great excitement and enjoyment to locals as well as creating a positive and internationally engaging P.R. story for town.

The community were invited to join us in creating a virtual exhibition inspired by the return of Banksy's artwork. We invited everyone to photograph their creations (or themselves, their children and their dogs!) on plinths placed around town and share the images on social media to create a virtual exhibition. The Plinth project ran all the way through from 17 September to the end of December, providing a much needed distraction for the town whilst also celebrating creativity and attracting visitors in a safe and socially distanced way. By December the project had been enjoyed by an estimated 70,000 visitors. In addition, Plinths were delivered to schools and community groups so that they could have their opportunity to 'get creative' and join the virtual exhibition. The project really captured the imagination of our highly creative community which led us to keep it open until the end of December.

In November we were delighted to present a brand-new festival reflecting much of the mood and atmosphere of these strange times. This new digital festival, *Autumn Reads*, was an exploration of celebrated artist and filmmaker Derek Jarman's book, *Modern Nature*, the highlight of which was a stunning film shot at Derek Jarman's Prospect Cottage in Dungeness featuring classical music and Ben Whishaw reading from the text. The film reached an audience of 53,555 people.

Over four days of *Autumn Reads* we invited the community to come together for a series of events and activities that explored themes of Jarman's diaries such as ideas of memoir, art, activism, gardening and more in creative ways. The festival was completely free to attend and reached audiences of almost 80,000 people.

Creative Folkestone partnered with South East Creatives to provide support to the hard-hit residents of the Creative Quarter and other local artists and businesses. We delivered a digital programme to explore ideas (available online from March 2020) from the Creative Quarter and the wider artistic community of how best to adapt digital technologies to keep companies afloat and promote artists' activities.

Our winter festival, *Christmas in the Quarter* was designed to light up and enhance the Creative Quarter, thus encouraging visitors and supporting our tenants. We invested in an enhanced Christmas light display which was really well received by our community and also produced a beautiful film, *All Things Grimm*, which was projected onto the Quarterhouse and shown at various times over the festive period. We were delighted to be able to go ahead with our traditional carol concert, despite restrictions, by moving it online.

The Plinth Project

From September through to December *The Plinth* project invited Folkestone to 'get creative' with a community engagement programme in lieu of next year's Creative Folkestone Triennial at a time when fun and engagement were exactly what the community needed.

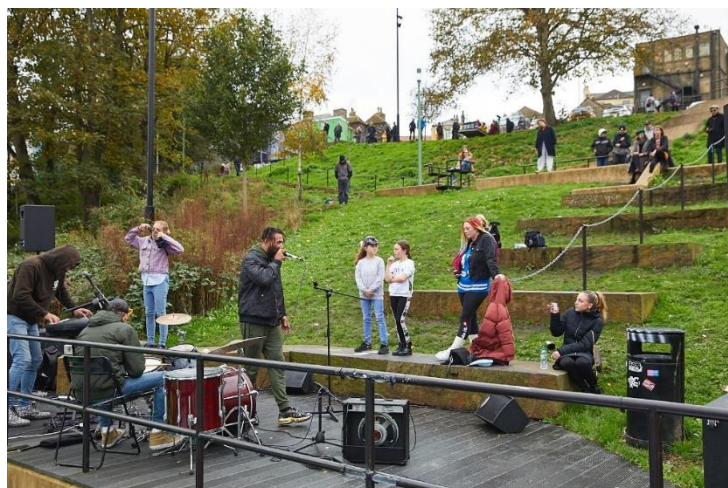
Ten empty plinths were placed around Folkestone in unique outdoor locations and people were invited to use Banksy's empty plinth as inspiration to create something to place on them. Many people used the plinths to display their creativity in inspiring and imaginative ways including anything from pottery to textiles, painting to mosaics, drawing to woodcarvings and everything in between. They were encouraged to take pictures and share them on social media and become part of a virtual exhibition on instagram #folkestoneplinth.

The project was a great success Over the first weekend, we recorded over 5,000 visitors and know that visitor numbers remained high throughout the 16 weeks of the project. We estimate that at least 70,000 people enjoyed the exhibition between September and December. The number of followers on our social media platforms also went up dramatically over the first weekend with engagement increasing by 355%. Activity on social media remained high with hundreds of people using #FolkestonePlinth.

Alongside the empty plinths, we commissioned local artists Malcolm Allen, Maureen Jordan and Tomas Poblete to create work which was displayed throughout the exhibition. As the project progressed, we recorded video content that took a closer look at the commissioned artworks and the films have been watched by more than 2,000 people so far.

There was a performance plinth painted on the ground in Payers Park by Hythe-based street artist Toze One who kicked off with a weekend of hip hop and scratch DJ workshops for young people. The *Performance Plinth* hosted a curated programme of live music, dance, poetry, theatre, comedy and performance art on Saturdays and Sundays between 11am-3pm and were attended by more than 2,000 people. We were delighted to be able to safely welcome the audiences to these outdoor performances and support local creatives with a space to showcase and practice their work.

A particular highlight was the celebration of World Mental Health Day and the team of *Normal? Festival of the Brain* took this as an opportunity to host a *Speakers' Corner* which was streamed to online audiences. Later in the afternoon East Kent Mind presented a variety of performances including a violinist and poetry reading. The 'Music is Medicine' takeover brought together a musical collective of vocalists, rappers and instrumentalists with a line-up of hip hop, grime, dub and reggae performances. These genres particularly resonated with some of the younger, local members of the community who were eager to join in with their own musical rap creations.



Below are images of the commissioned artworks from local artist Maureen Jordan (Image 1), Malcolm Allen (Image 2), Tomas Poblete (Image 3) and from artworks displayed by members of the community (Image 3-6).



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4

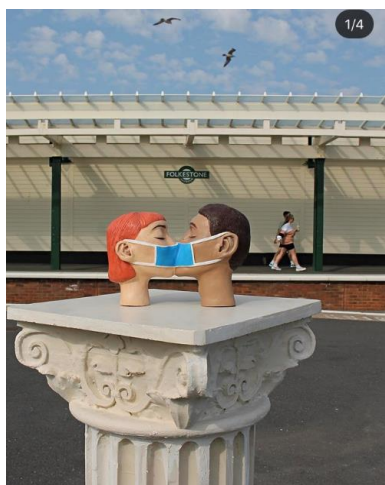


Image 5



Image 6

The Plinth Project Schools Programme

Mobile plinths were delivered to 17 local primary and secondary schools in the district. Each school had the opportunity to create and engage with the project in any way they wanted. Online resources were shared to support the project. The response from all schools has been outstanding and many teachers fed back that *The Plinth* gave pupils and teachers something to focus on and get excited about. 2,500 children and young people were involved in the project and, in addition, many schools exhibited their plinth in the foyer so that more pupils might have engaged in the project.

The Learning Officer also worked with six local artists to create inspirational digital workshops showcasing different ways to make sculptures using a wide variety of materials which were easily available and affordable. Each weekend one of the workshops was published via social media encouraging families to be creative and actively get involved in *The Plinth*. Free material packs linked to each workshop were available every weekend for families to be picked up from Glassworks or from a shop on the Old High Street.

In addition, 150 envelope packs encouraging all members of the community to take part in *The Plinth* project were handed out by our visitor experience team or delivered to the community groups Age UK, Mind, Homestart and Young Carers. The packs showed ideas for creating an object to be exhibited on a plinth, a variety of simple materials with links to the relevant online creative resources on Creative Folkestone's website.



Above are images of plinth artworks made by children from the Stella Maris School (left) and by a 'Fine Art and Photography' student from Earlscliffe College (right).

Autumn Reads

Following the postponement of the Folkestone Book Festival, we announced a new literary festival to take place over four days at the beginning of November. *Autumn Reads* was a digital festival presenting accessible programming to much wider audiences in a completely Covid safe way. Six talks/discussions and two films were presented online which also allowed the marketing and communication team to learn new skills in presenting and producing digital arts activity.

Leading up to the festival, with investment from the BBC's Space R&D Fund, we produced and presented, in collaboration with Screen South *Strange Concord: Music and Words*. This beautiful and visceral film was a centrepiece of the festival and combined excerpts of Derek Jarman's *Modern Nature* read by Ben Wishaw with live music by composers Henryk Gorecki and John Zorn. Filmed live at Prospect Cottage in Dungeness, the film premiered online as the highlight of the festival. It was extremely well received and the number of views on YouTube has reached 53,555. Prior to the festival the production was featured on Radio 4, BBC Radio Kent, The Evening Standard and The Guardian.



Above an image of Ben Wishaw at Prospect Cottage

As part of *Autumn Reads*, Creative Folkestone also partnered with local filmmaker Claire Unsworth to create *Folkestone Reads: Modern Nature*. We invited residents of Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh to take part in the film project charting the 21 months spanned by the journal from January 1989 to September 1990. The participants read excerpts from *Modern Nature*, covering themes from gardening and plants to art, film, sexuality, pandemic, illness and mortality in outdoor locations of their choice which had special significance to them. This included Sunny Sands at dawn and the Sound Mirror located at Capel-le-Ferne. The film celebrated and recorded local nature and the environment and the diverse community in Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh.

Performance Programme

Due to Covid, our planned performance programme was postponed giving way to a vibrant selection of curated films and the popular monthly Doc Club online with post screening talks taking place via Facebook Live. We have also been helping to deliver National Theatre Live and Royal Opera House Live 'At Home' events to Folkestone audiences as well as many other online endeavours.

We supported Kent Food Hub's move to Brewery Tap as well as a move online for Quarterhouse Book Group, Two Tone Yoga, Strangelove Festival and Folkestone Women's Forum. During this time, we supported research and development for Folkestone-based artists and provided help and advice to artists in the Creative Quarter with their applications for Arts Council Emergency funding.

In September, we launched *Open Sesame* and offered Quarterhouse auditorium for free to local creatives and community groups. *Open Sesame* is a space for rehearsals, training, research & development, recording, live streaming, small meetings, wiggling out or primal screaming, with technical support and assistance from the performing arts and learning team. The programme has been enormously successful and the auditorium was quickly booked out for a range of activities between September and the start of second lockdown at the beginning of December.

In November, Creative Folkestone launched *Open Sesame: Street*, offering monthly 'residencies' in the ground floor windows of Quarterhouse to local artists and creatives to display their work. The Quarterhouse windows, which are easily viewed from the pavement, provide passers-by the opportunity to see artwork in a safe outdoor environment whilst walking along Tontine Street.

For Christmas this year in the Creative Quarter, Creative Folkestone marked the festive season by screening giant projections of the film *All Things Grimm* onto the back wall of Quarterhouse. On several dates in December, Payers Park was transformed into a magical winter wonderland. The animated film depicted scenes from the Brother's Grimm Fairy Tales. The film and its soundtrack were made by young people during workshops that took place during the half-term holidays in October under the lead of local artist Lydia Hibbert and musician Randolph Matthews. The young people's interpretations of the stories through sound and vision were unique and quirky, bringing enjoyment to families and passers-by in Payers Park.

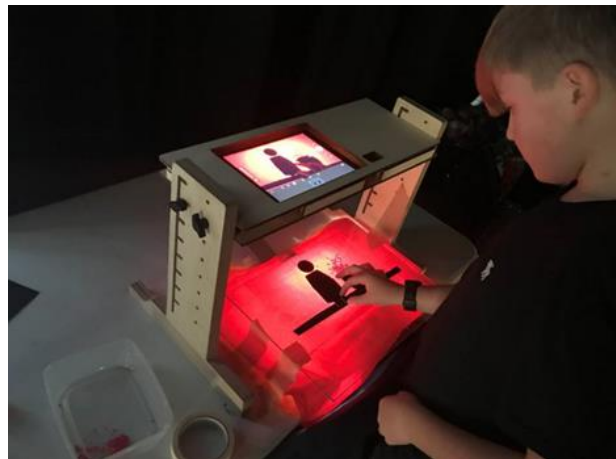
Creative Folkestone was delighted to invite several performers to St Mary & St Eanswythe's Church to take part in a carol concert that was filmed and then shared with audiences on YouTube. The concerts include singers and songwriter who shared their original music and performers reading selected pieces of writing and poems. These performances were a welcome and heartfelt expression of Folkestone's creative spirit through adversity.

Learning and Engagement

During May and June, a series of educational animations and written resources were created for the *Get Creative* part of Creative Folkestone's website. The resources were all inspired by Folkestone Artworks and aimed to provide suggestions for being creative and imaginative at home or in the classroom using materials that participants were likely to have in the home.

Working with our regular theatre and dance practitioners, we engaged in an 11-week project with children who attended our afterschool club, *Neon*, to create an incredible online Time Capsule documenting reflections and thoughts on lockdown. Children followed a weekly prompt to respond creatively in whatever way they wished. They submitted films, animations, drawings, sound pieces and expressed themselves through movement, performance, dance and visual art. Every week an edit of submissions was shared with the group.

Taking advantage of an easing of lockdown restrictions over the summer, we were delighted to be able to offer one of four previously planned summer schools in August. *NEON* regular theatre practitioners Sadie Hurley and James Middleton worked for a week with fifteen 8-11-year olds in Quarterhouse auditorium to explore ways to be creative and expressive in the current climate. Together (but socially distanced) the kids focused on visual arts, creative writing and digital performance. They made digital and craft-based work for display in Quarterhouse foyer windows as part of August's edition of *Last Fridays* on Tontine Street. Each child was provided with their own creative pack to use during their activities and which they could take home at the end of the week.



Above images of the animation workshop to produce the film and soundtrack for All Things Grimm

Creative Quarter

At the beginning of the first lockdown, Creative Folkestone partnered with South East Creatives to support local creatives to deliver a digital content programme. We supported the streaming of 13 talks via Facebook, which were then posted on our YouTube channel, receiving a total audience engagement of 16,274 clicks to view. This led to the development of *Tech Week* from 15 June to 19 June, offering a week of online activity exploring digital ideas from Folkestone's Creative Quarter and the wider artistic community. During *Tech Week* we hosted five daily webinars with seven creative professionals. The videos were streamed via Zoom on Facebook Live and then the recordings were added to our YouTube channel. We engaged an audience of 516 clicks to view including live audiences of 65 people on Facebook. In addition, we were able to commission three creatives to write editorials for the Creative Folkestone website. This programme of activity highlighted a new way of working for the organisation and has informed subsequent communications and programming.

As lockdown restrictions eased, we also focussed our communications on supporting the shops, cafes and businesses which were reopening. We produced a short video to reassure visitors and promote the safe return of the Creative Quarter.

Due to changing lockdown restrictions at the beginning of December we swiftly adapted our marketing and communications for our Winter Wonderland programme. Our main aim was to encourage people to shop local and support small businesses in and around the Creative Quarter whilst still enjoying the Christmas lights and video projections safely. To do this we combined digital and traditional tactics to engage with our audiences. Throughout December we ran a digital advent calendar that highlighted businesses and creatives in Folkestone. This was well received and helped us increase followers by 15% across all channels. The advent calendar finished with a short film that reflected and celebrated a year of activity from Creative Folkestone.

Folkestone Artworks and Triennial

During May and June established a group of volunteers who then assisted us with looking after the currently 74 artworks from 46 artists that form Folkestone Artworks, UK's largest urban exhibition of contemporary art. A proposal was drawn up that set out the framework of the volunteering programme and provided a detailed description of the volunteer role. The opportunity was advertised on Creative Folkestone's website and was promoted through local news websites and radio stations.

We were able to recruit ten volunteers who were assigned to single artworks which they checked daily and report their condition on a live log that was set up. Guided tours were organised for the volunteers giving them a chance to learn and receive comprehensive information about the artworks. The volunteers also provided crucial support during *The Plinth* as they were given the opportunity to share their enthusiasm and knowledge with visitors when stationed at their designated artworks or Mark Dion's *Mobile Gull Appreciation Unit*. The seagull was placed on the Harbour Arm and functioned as a temporary outdoor visitor centre for Creative Folkestone as Quarterhouse is currently closed.

Creative Folkestone Triennial 2021 artworks have continued to be fabricated during the last few months and artists kept up to date with progress and any unforeseen changes. The exhibition is now planned to take place over the summer 2021 and preparations are already in full swing.

January – March 2021 Planned Activity

During the first three months of 2021, government guidelines permitting, Quarterhouse and the Glassworks studio will be offered to the community through the *Open Sesame* programme. We already have several bookings from performers that are looking for a rehearsal space and film makers eager to carry out research to develop new ways of presenting and manipulating 'moving images' and to make them accessible to an online audience.

Open Sesame: Street, the series of monthly installations in the Quarterhouse ground floor windows will continue to showcase work from the local community with two artists whose work focusses on themes of memory lined up for January.

Our popular *DOC Club* online will continue to stream monthly curated documentaries followed by live chat online.

Every Sunday starting from 31 January for six weeks, Stacy Makishi will invite everybody to a digital Sunday service at the *Church of the Latter Day Sinners*. It offers a different kind of communion where people can come together to share joys and sorrows, do uncool dancing and meditate on what being human in 2021 really means.

Stacy Makishi also invites the community every Saturday during these 6 weeks to *Saturday Night Fever*, a live art show-and-tell club to help people explore their own creativity. As a safe space to share and connect with fellow creative spirits, Stacy provides a creative atmosphere that shuns imposter syndrome and welcomes imperfection.

During this time, the Creative Folkestone team will be working on plans to deliver the postponed Folkestone Book Festival in June followed by Folkestone Triennial in July.

Equality and Diversity

Diversity and equality are embedded in all Creative Folkestone activities giving everyone in the community independent of their racial and social background and ability the chance to have a full cultural and creative life. It enriches and completes our artistic programme and aims to make our audiences, workforce and governance all inclusive.

From application to appointment people with protected characteristics are slightly over recruited i.e. the staff team have more diversity than the pool of applicants. Staff are encouraged to support CF's commitments to diversity and equality and to ensure that strategic decisions are efficiently implemented.

We have been successful in our application to become a host for a Weston Jerwood fellow and the organisational development for this has begun in January 2021.

Our Quarterhouse programme has shown increased diversity with regards to artists and performers during the last few years. Folkestone Triennial and Book Festival have established processes for ensuring the diversity of artists is maintained.

A survey carried out through Audience Finder demonstrates that our audiences broadly reflect local demographics. We will ensure that protected characteristic groups, and those disadvantaged by social and economic challenges such as mental health issues and socio-economic deprivation participate in our programme. These groups are particularly vulnerable as a direct impact of the Coronavirus.

We are proud that Arts Council England have reported that Creative Folkestone has achieved a strong rating in the creative case for diversity.

The Development Team, January 2021