

Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee.

5 October 2010

Report of the Head of Arts & Culture

West Offices - Opportunities for Public Art

Summary

1. This briefing paper outlines the discussions already held with the developers of West Offices – S. Harrison Developers Ltd, and details the next steps in the process of embedding public art into the development of a new civic building for York. The aim is to ensure the highest quality design while recognising that as the Council Headquarters for the city, we should use the opportunity to celebrate both our contemporary artists & craft workers, and our artisan heritage.

Background

2. Since 1998, City of York Council has required that public art has to be a proactively considered element of any new development scheme in York. The council has committed itself to ensure that all development on behalf of the council has a public art element within the development brief.
3. Successful public art is work that resonates with the site and context, and creates an opportunity for the range of people using the site to engage with it. As an integral part of the new Headquarters for the City of York Council the public art commissions should also aim to capture the skills and creativity of the local community, embrace the heritage of our craft workers, artists and artisans and reflect the ambitions of, and new directions for, the City of York. In short it should enhance both the role of the building and the surrounding public realm environment of the building.

Current situation

4. Through client discussions with the developers we have agreed the following principal. Public art should not be confined to one area or one audience, it is important to foster a sense of identity, dynamism and of interpreting the ambitions for the city. It must also be public, not hidden away in boardrooms or staff only spaces but used to welcome in the community, to celebrate our local skills and delineate those things that make York unique.
5. Jointly we have identified public art opportunities around the following general areas:

- Design landscaping of the main approach gardens
 - Seats, benches, shelters in the outdoor areas
 - Functional artwork in the main reception areas
 - Artistic interventions that create a positive and engaging visual statement for the division between the public and the private space
 - Window treatment and lighting schemes that display the beauty of the building after dark but also create a welcoming approach at other times of the day.
6. In addition to the ideas given above there are a number of commissioning opportunities that could be functional interventions that are embedded in the building. These could encompass flooring in the public area, seating in reception or public meeting rooms, lighting in the interior public spaces, and wall space that enable artists to design and influence colour, pattern and use texture and text. The intention must be to have a co-ordinated approach to the building and its environs where the art, the architecture and the landscape are complementary.
 7. Working within the developers budget we have also established the principal that where any artwork has a functional use then only the element of making it public art will be charged to the public art budget i.e. if outdoor seating were to be commissioned, the charge to the public art budget would be the cost LESS any money already included in the development budget for outdoor seating.
 8. We have also agreed that a balance of practitioners should be sought reflecting the local traditions in stone, metal and glass and that new directions supporting sustainable development in lighting, landscape art and digital art should also be included in the scope of the artistic commissions.
 9. In order to maintain a clear client and developer relationship there will be small focussed steering group of CYC chosen representatives and developer/ architect, that will work with a commissioning manager appointed by the developers to oversee the artistic commissions and ensure the integration of the public artwork into the development programme. It is intended that approved artists be appointed at an early stage in order to bring together a coordinated public arts programme into a cohesive whole.
 10. The Commissioning Manager would be expected to:
 - Work closely with the architects and development team to identify, prioritise, and cost the outline public art commissions within the project
 - Work with City of York Council/ developer steering group to agree the commissions offered
 - Develop the briefs for the commissions and prepare a short list of local artists and craftspeople with recommendations to the steering group. If appropriate, consideration will be given to a design competition for elements of the external lighting works or landscaping.

- To manage the implementation of the agreed commissions working closely with the artists and the project team to ensure successful completion of works and adherence to the budget and the brief.
- Agree an approach that ensures public participation in the commissioning process.

11. Members are asked to note and comment on the work undertaken with the developers so far.

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Report Approved

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Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: Planning application for West Offices.