



Do arts hold the answer?

30 Year NOW: A future for the Lee Valley
by The Harrison Studio and Associates

Exploring public space's potential through creatively led research has yielded exciting results for Bright Sparks, artistic director **Eileen Woods** reports.

Bright Sparks is a unique funding scheme which supports arts and design led research and development projects which explore new ideas about both the physical and social aspects of public open space.

To date, three rounds of funding with a total of 11 awards have produced an exciting body of work, generated new partnerships, influenced design and use of public

spaces and proved the value and relevance of investing in ideas.

The primary motivation for the scheme was to fund and mentor artists and their project partners to undertake research which was conceptually challenging and which might not otherwise be funded.

The scheme champions the role of the artist in the development of the public realm, and their intuitive response to spaces, places, people and

wildlife, not as independent public art practitioners, but as creative collaborators willing to extend their work beyond their comfort zone.

The Bright Sparks concept was first developed in 2006 by Haring Woods Associates/Landscape + Arts Network Services as part of the five year Gunpowder Park project which has overall produced a range of influential arts led research and development initiatives.

Gunpowder Park's brand and creative policy, for which HWA was responsible, responded to the Park's heritage of experimentation; the site was formerly a Royal Ordnance testing facility, transformed by Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (LVRPA) into a 90 hectare country park for the benefit of people, wildlife and the arts. Core funding for all Gunpowder Park projects was provided through a partnership agreement with LVRPA.

Primary funding for Bright Sparks was secured through Arts Council England, East and London through their Grants for the Arts programme. Knowledge East, Essex County Council, Hertfordshire County Council and the Green Heart Partnership provided partner funding and Landscape Design Trust/*Green Places* have been the scheme's media partner.

Bright sparks

The Bright Sparks process evolved through HWA's ideas team and interdisciplinary working practice, led by Eileen Woods, artistic director and Tony Beckwith, creative development director and Michael Woods, executive director, later joined by Adriana Marques senior producer/curator for rounds two and three.

Together, their experience as creative individuals, entrepreneurs and public realm specialists provided a solid foundation for the Bright Sparks approach and aspirations.

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What sets Bright Sparks apart from other R&D schemes is the freedom afforded to the awardees to follow the new directions in which their work took them, to fully exploit the creative process and welcome the unexpected, rather than accept the probable.

The freedom to take risks, without fear of failure was as important and motivating to the Gunpowder Park team as to the awardees. The professional development value of Bright Sparks for all participants has been exceptional and is documented in the award projects and evident in the quality and range of creative and strategic work now being produced.

“We live in a time obsessed with outputs, outcomes and their consequential evaluation.

How refreshing and exciting it has been to give creative people time to think with no emphasis on outcomes but on supporting that process that define us as human beings with our ability to have and then nurture an idea.” *Tony Beckwith*

Three mentors, representing three different sectors and approaches worked with the Gunpowder Park/ Bright Sparks team, selecting and mentoring the projects and awardees.

Fred Manson, a registered architect is an Associate Director with the Thomas Heatherwick Studio, a CABE design review panel member, trustee of Open House/Art in the Open. Previously he was Director of Regeneration and Environment for LB Southwark (1994-2001).

“I personally enjoy not knowing where these projects will end, and following and guiding passion and interest of the artists and creative practitioners we support.”

Fred Manson

Darryl Newport is the Director of Sustainability for the University of East London, where he manages the Manufactured Aggregate Research Centre. He is a member of many professional organisations including the Associate Parliamentary Sustainable Waste Group and Environmental Technology Research Centre for London.

“Bright Sparks is one of the few opportunities where the arts and sciences really come together. I came on board to provide my expertise, but increasingly found that these projects were developing ideas and paths that can really influence the thinking and debate surrounding sustainability.”

Darryl Newport

Andre Dekker is a Dutch artist who lives and works in Rotterdam as part of Observatorium, an arts led organisation dedicated to art in relation to architecture, communities and landscape. Their motto is: time and space for focusing attention. www.observatorium.org

“We need new ideas, enough is being done. We need time to allow ourselves to stand still.”

Andre Dekker

A crucial aspect of the Bright Sparks process is the sourcing of new contacts, research partners and participants and Bright Sparks

awardees accessed individuals and organisations in arts, environment, local authorities and regional agencies; these specific project contacts have now fed into the overall Bright Sparks scheme for knowledge sharing and networking. Initially Bright Sparks was expected to engage with a regional audience, but quickly developed national international connections which have impacted on specific projects and the scheme overall.

Fostering a ‘fellowship’ of like minded creative individuals based throughout the UK and abroad, came through workshops and events with three seminars providing the awardees with a platform to present their work, either as work in progress or completed to invited audiences of funders, partners, creative practitioners and public realm professionals.

The idea of sharing is also crucial to the integrity of the scheme;

HWA wanted to ensure that this publicly funded work would be accessible from proposal stage through to the final report and ideas and documentation, all of which is published in full on the Haring Woods/Gunpowder Park website.

“It’s important for Arts Council England to support innovative schemes such as Bright Sparks, which truly promotes opportunities for artists to take risks.”

Dawn Giles, Visual Arts Officer, Arts Council England, East

The Bright Sparks ‘brand’ has now been successfully established as a vital methodology transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries, supporting emerging and established artists to influence the future of our public spaces.

Visit www.haringwoods.com for full details of all Bright Sparks projects.

Bottom left: Sensory Navigation
Bottom right: Urban Lexicon
Below: Immersion



Bright Sparks showcase

A flavour of the funded projects...

The projects, listed in order of their award rounds demonstrate the diversity of ideas, approaches and outcomes.

Round 3



Round 3 Rosanna Vitiello and Marcus Willcocks

Unravelling the Urban Lexicon

Working from New York, Barcelona and London, designers and public space specialists, Rosanna Vitiello and Marcus Willcocks investigated how the physical elements of open spaces – from signage, to furniture and buildings can determine our perception of a place and influence our emotional reaction towards it.



Graham Harwood, Richard Wright and Matsuko Yokokoji Eco Media

The artist collective formerly known as Mongrel, propose a new exploration of ecosystems as a communications network that can allow exchanges of 'viewpoint' between the human and animal worlds. As part of their research, they staged a series of live experiments at the Village Green Cultural Olympiad event in Chalkwell Park.



Terry Orchard and Simon Lee Dicker Sensory Navigation

Artists Terry and Simon developed a participatory arts project aimed at improving the experience of open spaces for young people with special needs, highlighting issues of accessibility, navigation, choice and interpretation. The students, parents and teachers of Pioneer School, Basildon contributed to this work, which is now being circulated to inform planners and open space managers



Michael Pinsky Order to Chaos

Artist Michael Pinsky has used the dynamic landscape of Gunpowder Park, and the new urban developments to its north and west borders to consider the relationships created between these 'settlements' and the 'natural' open space in front of them.



He has produced a memorable book of Fables, with text and watercolour images to share his ideas.



Alex Murdin Immersion

This transdisciplinary project by artist Alex Murdin, based in Devon researches the relationship between leisure and ecology in the UK, to develop new uses for lidos, tidal pools and other water courses, exploring their potential as places and spaces for ecological education and recreation. Backed by considerable factual reference, Murdin offers creative and entertaining options.

Round 2



Round 2 Justin Carter Renewable Devices for Art & Ecology

Exploring the rapidly evolving possibilities of renewable energy, Glasgow based artist Justin Carter has developed an extensive series of ambitious proposals for functional sculptures which integrate these new technologies in social situations. Carter, traditionally product oriented, fully explored his ideas through a series of six sketchbooks of ideas.



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The 30 Year NOW, a Future for the Lee Valley

Renowned American eco-artists Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison have been exploring issues associated with climate change and specifically rising sea levels around mainland Britain, with colleagues David Haley and Chris Fremantle. This research for a specific proposal for the future of Lee Valley, formed part of Greenhouse Britain, a larger work co-funded by DEFRA and exhibited in London, throughout the UK and in New York City. www.greenhousebritain.net



Round 1



Round 1 David Buck Typography

Inspired by contemporary music notation, and film director Tarkovsky, Buck's research explored applying the temporal qualities of music composition to devise new methods of planning and drawing landscapes to reflect the durational elements of open spaces. This work has informed a new MA course at the University of East London.



Theresa Smith Urban Viewpoint

Through her research and collaboration with ecological professionals, Theresa Smith developed inventive visual triggers enabling busy people in cities to become aware of the rich mix of wildlife that is often an unnoticed part of their daily lives.



Eileen Haring Woods

Eileen is a Senior Partner in Haring Woods Associates with an interdisciplinary practice in arts and culture and the public realm... Artistic Director for all HWA projects, she led on the creative development of the five year Gunpowder Park project. www.haringwoods.com



Emma Smith & Sadie Stowell SubRural

Artist Emma Smith and landscape architect Sadie Stowell began an ongoing creative investigation into how the rural landscape is perceived and how these perceptions can be recreated or simulated within inner city environments. Co-funded by Hertfordshire County Council and the Green Heart Partnership, they focused their workshops in Lambeth and Hertfordshire. Final research can be viewed at www.subrural.co.uk.



John Cockram Environmental Health

Artist John Cockram explores how we can apply human skills and qualities such as 'protection', 'well-being' and 'healing' to the natural world and how the human qualities of 'care and concern' change when taken out of a healthcare context and applied to the environment. The conceptual intricacy of the work attracted scientists, academics, environmental and diversity specialists to contribute their time and thoughts.

