

Abbotswood on Site Public Art Commission

Report of the Community and Leisure Portfolio Holder

Recommended:

1. That £56,000 be allocated from Section 106 contributions for on-site public art in respect of the public art commission for Abbotswood in Romsey.
2. That £5,869 be allocated from Section 106 contributions for on-site public art in respect of the future maintenance
3. To award the contract to Thrussells (Thomas and Gary Thrussell)

Recommendation to Council.

SUMMARY:

- Test Valley Borough Council secured a contribution of £61,869 for on-site public art at Abbotswood through Section 106 agreements.
- The report sets out the procurement procedure that has been undertaken to select an artist to carry out the commission, and requests authority to release sufficient funds to deliver the project and award the contract to the selected artist.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Test Valley Borough Council secured a contribution of £61,869 for on-site public art at Abbotswood through Section 106 agreements. The report sets out the procurement procedure that has been undertaken to select an artist to carry out the commission, and requests authority to release sufficient funds to deliver the project and award the contract to the selected artist.
- 1.2 The commission has been developed with best practice and the TVBC Public Art Strategy.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Abbotswood development is located 1.5km to the north east of Romsey. The development of 800 new residential units is an extension of the existing residential neighbourhoods of Woodley, Cupperham and Abbotswood. The Abbotswood development includes a nature reserve that is used by residents of both Abbotswood and Romsey.
- 2.2 A community consultation programme completed by SPUD (Space, Place Making and Urban Design) in 2014 revealed that the new and existing communities at Abbotswood and Romsey would prefer a series of public art works that would connect residents of Abbotswood to the surrounding communities of Romsey Extra.

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2.3 The SPUD consultation report identified a range of themes that were proposed in the artists brief, including the desire for the artworks to be:

- Small-scale, creating impact through multiple sites.
- Site sensitive considering nature and wildlife.
- To create and connect routes and utilise focal points.
- To use contemporary and robust materials.
- To incorporate bright colours, touch and interactivity.
- To consider humour and accessibility.

2.4 In 2015 Nicola Henshaw was commissioned to deliver the off-site public art and created the Romsey to Abbotswood Sprat and Winkle trail including unique floor plaques along canal pathway, bespoke oak carved benches and a vitreous enamel panelled mural in the underpass leading to Abbotswood and Fishlake meadows.

3 Commissioning Approach

3.1 In February 2020 a Public Art Commission brief was advertised locally, regionally and nationally. This included Test Valley Creative Network, Hampshire County Council Arts News, Arts Council Arts Jobs, IXIA Public Art Network and the Royal British Sculptors Association Newsletter. Twenty applications were received.

3.2 Using specific criteria drawn up to meet the objectives of the brief the proposals were shortlisted to six. These 6 proposals were then considered in detail by the commissioning panel.

3.3 The commissioning panel is made up of stakeholders in the project including a resident of Abbotswood, TVBC Arts Officer, Community Development Officer for Abbotswood, Senior Countryside Officer, The Director of Harold Hillier Gardens and Arboretum and Cllr Janet Burnage.

3.4 The steering group have now reconvened and decided on three artists to invite to interview. Three artists were invited to present their proposals at interview on 16 September to a panel consisting of a local resident, the Director of Hillier's Gardens, Cllr Burnage, the Arts Officer Faye Perkins and Community Development Officer Amanda Taylor.

3.5 Based on the evaluation criteria and the overall quality of the presentation and proposal, the panel were unanimous in their decision to award the commission to Thrussells, subject to Cabinet approval.

3.6 Thrussells have proposed a trail made up of pointer way markers, sculptural way markers and feature sculptures. The materials they use are hot dipped zinc galvanised mild steel and fused glass developed for durability.

4 Engaging communities

- 4.1 The artist proposes a three phase programme for community engagement.
- 4.2 Phase one will be research, gathering information and meeting with a variety of groups. This will include site meetings, community walks with historian and ecologist and introductory meetings with groups in local settings such as care home, schools and community spaces. Thrussells have proposed utilising smart phones and their own website to allow people to access information and presentations without the need to be indoors in shared spaces. This would be used while walking routes and in this discovery phase.
- 4.3 Phase two will be developing the main subject themes from the research through the workshops. They will enable groups to explore the themes through creating artwork which could be facilitated in outdoor classroom and in covid safe settings. There will be a total of six workshops to create the designs for the way markers and feature sculptures. The pointer way markers will be designed as part of the consultation with the local historian, ecologist and residents walk to ensure that they point to the key areas and places of interest.
- 4.4 Phase three will be a public exhibition showcasing the final designs. This will take the format of an outdoor exhibition using PVC banners displayed in the local area so no one needs to come indoors.
- 4.5 A social media page will be created to enable wider communication with residents and discussion about the project.
- 4.6 **Schedule**
- 4.7 For a successful project we would like to start with talking to the community and residents at Abbotswood, and developing ideas through workshop settings. We therefore propose to delay the start until January 2021 when we hope that Covid restrictions may have eased further. Of course this is an unknown and so we will work closely with Thrussells to find ways to safely engage with the community to progress the project on time.
- 4.8 The project should be complete by January 2022.

5 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 5.1 The work we do through the public art programme directly delivers priorities for Test Valley from the Corporate Plan as detailed below. In creating projects where communities can get involved in what happens in their neighbourhoods we are empowering current and future generations to create and enhance their own spaces feeling empowered and proud of where they live and work.
- 5.2 The artists brief asks for community engagement to be at the core of how artists are developing their ideas and final work and for this particular commission is focused on how residents can enjoy their surroundings of the new development so closely connected by the nature reserve and green areas of the borough.

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Communities to be empowered, connected and able to build upon their strengths

Building upon our positive track record of working with communities. We will do this by harnessing the strengths that exist within communities, so that local people are able to contribute and play an active role.

People to be able to live well and fulfil their aspirations

Creating communities that have the infrastructure and accessibility to meet the needs of a changing and growing population. Establishing attractive, sustainable and vibrant communities for people to live, work and enjoy.

Growing the potential of the local environment for current and future generations

Enhancing the quality of our public realm to improve the local environment, so that these are attractive spaces and places that people can enjoy and spend time.

6 Consultations/Communications

- 6.1 The steering group has been created by officers, members and individuals with a close or direct responsibility to the site. The brief has been developed in consultation with these professionals and each have taken part in the shortlisting phase and been given the opportunity to talk to the artist through the interviews.
- 6.2 As with each public art commission we share information about the project briefs with portfolio holders and relevant council members and seek advice from legal service when required.

7 Options

- a) To approve the proposal
- b) To do nothing

8 Option Appraisal

- 8.1 To approve the Arts Officer to draw down the funding from S106 contribution and to contract the artist to support TVBC to create projects where communities can get involved in what happens in their neighbourhoods. It empowers current and future generations to create and enhance their own spaces feeling proud of where they live and work.
- 8.2 If the public art is not commissioned the S106 contributions will need to be repaid to the developer.

9 Risk Management

- 9.1 A risk assessment has been completed in accordance with the Council's risk management process and the existing risk controls in place mean that no significant risks (red or amber) have been identified.

10 Resource Implications

- 10.1 All costs for the development of the artwork, artist fees and fabrication are include in the commission fee of £56,000. The maintenance has been set aside at £5,869.

11 Legal Implications

- 11.1 None

12 Equality Issues

- 12.1 An EQIA screening has been completed in accordance with the Council's EQIA methodology and no potential for unlawful discrimination and/or low level or minor negative impact have been identified, therefore a full EQIA has not been carried out.

13 Other Issues

- 13.1 Sustainability and Addressing a Changing Climate

- 13.1.1 Thrussells overarching ethos is 'Metal sculpture as nature intended'. Their artwork is created to ensure durability and longevity and to ensure it leaves lasting impressions for generations to come

- 13.2 Wards/Communities Affected

- 13.2.1 Cupernham Ward will be the focus for community engagement and activity

14 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

- 14.1 The commissioning panel has undertaken a rigorous commissioning process.

- 14.2 It is proposed that the commission will be awarded to Thrussells based on strength of their proposal and presentation in relation to the aims and ambitions as set out in the brief.

- 14.3 Thrussells presented strong ideas with solutions to elements of working with communities in these uncertain times. They bring experience gained from working in the sector for many years which comes across in their presentation to us.

- 14.4 It is recommended that authorisation is given to draw down £61,869 from the Section 106 contributions to enable the project to proceed and that the contract be awarded.

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<u>Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)</u>			
None			
<u>Confidentiality</u>			
It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.			
No of Annexes:	2	File Ref:	N/A
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Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	2 December 2020