

TATTON PARK BIENNIAL

Background paper for Cheshire East Council

INTRODUCTION

The first Tatton Park Biennial of contemporary art opened to the public in May 2008. With over thirty artists creating new works for the formal gardens of one of the region's best-loved historic properties, the Biennial extended a welcoming invitation to first time and returning visitors to consider the site, its many contexts and its place in today's society over five months in 2008.

As Cheshire's most popular visitor attraction, Tatton Park occupies a unique place in the heart of the region: a location for relaxation and contemplation, a learning resource and a landscape steeped in history. The Biennial brings additional views and ideas to the site, making it one in which the present and the future can be as prominent as the past.

An overarching vision connects each Biennial, with an understanding of the site and its attendant histories, the local people and industry who inform its past, present and future and a deep seated commitment to developing new audiences. Tatton Park itself provides the continuity between the Biennial exhibitions, each of which will adopt a different curatorial theme and be clearly differentiated from generic 'art in the garden' exhibitions. The genesis for each theme will be found in Tatton Park's own spaces and history, with each Biennial drawing out creative responses to a particular facet of the site. For 2008 the theme related to botanic collections and collectors – providing a direct link to Cheshire's Year of Gardens 2008. The Biennial is curated to attract a national profile, but also to be accessible and relevant to a broader audience of all ages and backgrounds. This objective is achieved through careful selection of the artists and artworks, but also through interpretive material and the opportunities created by an Access Programme that provides 'outreach' opportunities. The Biennial is intended to help achieve a strategic objective to position Tatton Park as the cultural venue of choice in Cheshire, help build the cultural capital of the wider area and bring strategic benefits to its communities, economy and profile/image.

Evaluation of Tatton Park Biennial 2008

The 2008 Biennial involved many groups and individuals in the development of site-specific works and projects. Bringing new visitors to Tatton Park and offering new experiences for returning audiences. The Biennial provided 30 artists, writers and performers developed site-specific works for the grounds including six semi-permanent works and 12 ongoing commissions, Education & Access programmes, residencies, film screenings, talks, walks, symposia, tours and performances. The Biennial was well publicised and received major coverage in local, national and international media. The Biennial was a runner-up for the 2009 Lever Prize, RSA Arts & Ecology curators selected one of its artworks as one of the best international artworks of 2008 and the Biennial is shortlisted for both the National Museum and Heritage award for temporary exhibitions and two Cheshire tourism awards. The

Biennial was internationally recognised within art, national and international press and media, placing Tatton Park, for the first time on an international art footing, while Biennial commissioned works have been selected for exhibitions at venues of international repute.

In December 2008, Arts About Manchester produced a 'Visitor and Economic Assessment' for the Biennial, which suggests many of the Biennial's aims were achieved in 2008, with a significant shift in economic returns, including

- *Net total 33.47 FTE employment and additional expenditure of £1.17m to Cheshire economy*
- *Net total 31.01 FTE employment and additional expenditure of £2.04m to Northwest economy*
- *Volunteer value over £10k within Cheshire economy and £9.6k in Northwest economy*
- *Levered funding & in-kind support of £89.4k to Cheshire's and £111.1k to Northwest economy*
- *Over £20k additional visitors to Cheshire economy, of which £13.3k from outside Northwest*
- *The Biennial was a positive contributor to Cheshire's Year of Gardens '08*

When comparing the expenditure generated within the Cheshire and North West economies with the investment contribution from NWDA, Arts Council England, North West and Cheshire County Council, we can calculate that for every £1 of investment made, a further £5.83 and £10.60 was generated in expenditure within the Cheshire sub-region and North West region respectively.

The Biennial aimed to raise the cultural profile and public perception of Cheshire and Arts About Manchester's findings suggest a new visitor profile emerged as a result of the Biennial 55% (47,300) of visitors came from outside Cheshire, with 48% (22,700) of these coming from outside the North West. The Biennial was the main reason for visiting Tatton Park amongst 59% of visitors from outside the region, and amongst 30% of visitors from elsewhere in the North West. The Access programme benefited a number of targeted communities and schools.

TATTON PARK BIENNIAL 2009-2012

Between 2009 -2012, the Biennial will be active with a range of projects and artistic interventions that can attract audiences on many levels, from casual website visitors to participatory groups based in the communities that Tatton Park serves daily, to art aficionados, whose choice to attend the Biennial will influence public opinion and media coverage on an international level.

In 2010, the Biennial will open up the grounds and Mansion with new commissions investigating Tatton's connections to place and people under the title of 'Framing Identity', using the artworks and programmes to explore identity and place-making. In the Olympic Year, the Biennial will deliver its third summer of artworks and collaborations - this time recognising the history of aviation, science and creativity at

Tatton Park through the title of 'Flights of fancy'. This work will involve partners from diverse disciplines, from aeronautical engineers to deep space research scientists, from balloon makers to air traffic controllers and museum curators. A large scale undertaking with massive public appeal, the 2012 Biennial will address a fascinating history with experimental works that will invite an international public to take part. Both these themes provide the scope for the Biennial to be at the core of a wider cultural programme in Cheshire during the Cultural Olympiad. The themes of identity and place in 2010 and exploration and creativity in 2012 have direct relevance to the communities and economy of Cheshire and the wider region. This provides the opportunity to develop the potential of an outreach programme with wider benefits to Cheshire East as an integral part of the project. The themes would provide the starting point for outreach projects with targeted communities. There is also potential for taking up the 2010 theme as a creative consultation project that could be expanded to incorporate a wider project across the area linked to the 2012 NW projects. The biennial can also be used to stimulate programming links with the new MMU Arts Centre.

The 'Interim Years' of 2009 and 2011 will contain projects that are specifically devised to aide in building capacity and scope for the major activity contained in the Biennial editions of 2010 and 2012. In particular, these Interim Years will focus on marketing and promotion, development of new audiences and the attraction of new partners, sponsors and participants.

With 2010 focussing on 'Framing Identity' and 2012 looking at 'Flights of Fancy', there is potential for both Biennials to, incrementally, raise the profile of Cheshire East, encourage local and regional economic benefit, establish Cheshire as a serious contender on the UK arts stage and invigorate the area's cultural life.

MEETING AMBITIONS

The Biennial is capable of leading in the delivery of many critical aspects outlined in the Cheshire East Council Corporate Plan for 2009-2010. Acting as a focal point for the region, the Council and arts & cultural groups, the events scheduled from 2009-2012 contain programmes that can address issues outlined below:

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Working with children and young people is critical to the success of the Biennial – such work can help to build confidence, as new vocabularies and ways of seeing the world are developed and explored. Working alongside artists to understand that learning is a pleasurable, life-long undertaking can help young people to reevaluate their relationships to creativity and problem-solving and their personal ambitions for the future.

In 2008, the Biennial connected with children and young people by commissioning locally based artist Simon Woolham to work with four primary schools: Egerton in Knutsford, Kingsmead in Northwich, Button Lane and Crossacres, both in Wythenshawe. For 2009-2012, such work will continue and expand, opening up creative potentials with young people, groups and schools in the local area. The

wider cultural programme across Cheshire East will take up this theme working with young people on issues of identity and sense of place through a youth arts festival.

ADULT HEALTH & WELLBEING

The Biennial's work contributes positively to the life of local adult communities through a commissioning process that addresses their home and shared histories. Developing artworks that deliberately reference places and ideas that are already familiar to many can help break down the perception of art as 'elitist' or 'exclusive', making local people the 'experts'. Contemporary art production, with a focus on workshops and sharing, has been repeatedly proven as a powerful tool when working with vulnerable adults.

The relationship between place, belonging and mental health will be considered in the 2010 Biennial and new works that target harder to reach groups will be commissioned. In 2012, the focus with such groups will be on creativity and work to increase opportunities for lively communication and shared discussion will be developed.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES

The Biennial has a clear commitment to the communities it serves. It is critical to the work of 2009-2012 that such communities are brought in to the events as participants, co-authors, audiences and critics. Perceptions about place and identity are paramount to this work, and the Biennial looks to these groups for inspiration. Using the 'Framing Identity' theme, the wider cultural programme will also be developed to address issues around community cohesion.

TACKLING EXCLUSION & PROMOTING EQUALITY

Much of the Biennial's previous work has addressed the need to bring in groups and individuals who, for one reason or another, face exclusion from contemporary art settings. Specifically in 2008, the Biennial targeted traditionally non-arts audiences, worked with minority elderly groups, and developed works with children from socially deprived areas.

Much of the 2010 and 2012 thematics address issues of equality and the breaking down of exclusion. Work in these years will, necessarily, address groups who are under-represented either as visitors to Tatton Park or as participants and audiences for contemporary art production.

LOCAL ECONOMY

In 2008, the Biennial attracted first-time visitors from outside the region from as far afield as Europe, South America and Asia. Many new visitors were from prosperous economic groups, for whom cultural tourism is an important aspect of their lives. Many local businesses were used to produce goods and services for the Biennial, while for every £1 of investment, £5.83 was generated in expenditure within Cheshire

The Biennial can continue to improve the local economy through:

- Making Cheshire East an attractive cultural option for visitors, businesses and investors
- Lifting Cheshire's profile and image as a culturally engaged environment
- Promoting Cheshire's image as one that embraces the innovative as well as the historical
- Making Cheshire East's rural setting an attractive counterpoint to urban cultural centres
- Internationally promoting Gardens of Distinction as a premiere attraction in Cheshire East
- Developing the Biennial as the creative 'hub' for Cheshire during the Cultural Olympiad
- Raising arts, cultural and living aspirations for the area
- Raising awareness of the area through the promotion of cultural capital
- Linking with businesses to create a dynamic and flexible image for the area

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental sustainability is taken extremely seriously by the Biennial and this is reflected in a number of ways. In 2008, the Biennial employed local businesses to produce work, lowering the need for carbon-heavy travel, worked, wherever possible, to create works that had low carbon footprints and promoted ideas about sustainability, off-grid living and DIY food production. The ability art has to engage with various publics and develop dialogues concerning contemporary issues, such as sustainability, are taken very seriously by the Biennial. In 2010 and 2012, the Biennial will work with a working model for delivery that takes sustainability seriously, and work with RSA Arts & Ecology to develop installations and debates that address the environment.