

Art and historical interpretation strategy for The Symington Building, Harborough District Council (Version 5d)

DRAFT FOR COMMENT

Prepared by Creative Leicestershire for Harborough District Council
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1. Vision

The keynote for the Arts and Interpretation Strategy is
'Harborough – a sense of place'.

Our suggested vision for the Arts Strategy is:

The Symington Building is where culture, arts, learning and service combine to create a distinctive sense of place in the heart of the town.

What makes the Symington Building distinctive is the way it expresses the local cultural identity by:

- bringing together local history and contemporary arts;
- commitment to, and demonstration of, sustainable development;
- respecting continuity and local character while promoting accessibility, innovation and excellence.

2. Objectives

Bringing together local history and contemporary arts

2.1.1. Arts development

- Provide creative opportunities for artists to produce new artworks;
- Ensure that the restoration project has expert capacity available to fulfil the Arts Strategy;
- Involve local arts organisations and locally-resident artists in celebrating the Symington Building;
- Celebrate, build on and strengthen the capacity of the local arts infrastructure;
- Enrich the interpretation of the history of the building, the town and the locality and support the achievement of the Symington building's educational, tourism and conservation objectives.

2.1.2. Knowledge and skills exchange

- Facilitate exchange of knowledge, ideas and technology between artists, engineers, historians, conservationists and planners;

- New skills - provide artist-led participatory workshops and events for diverse local communities and visitors to assist in creating temporary and permanent artworks linked to the heritage of the Symington Building.

Commitment to, and demonstration of, sustainable development

2.1.3. Sustainable development

- Contribute to sustainable economic development through cultural tourism;
- Promote the use of environment-friendly methods and technologies, recycled and locally sourced materials.

Respecting continuity and local character while promoting accessibility, innovation and excellence

2.1.4. Accessibility

- Enable residents and visitors of all ages and backgrounds to use and enjoy the Symington building and the high quality services and arts experiences within it;
- Engage diverse groups: rural and urban communities, schools and young people, older people, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities;

2.1.5. Community

- Provide opportunities for local people from diverse groups, of all ages and abilities, to participate in creative experiences;

2.1.6. Education

- Education Programme - facilitate ongoing history and archive projects, linked to the National Curriculum;
- Education & New Skills - facilitate acquisition of new personal, creative and professional skills through participation in arts projects, reflecting local needs;

2.1.7. Archive

- Use creative means to document the project and the work of organisations supporting it;
- Develop links with projects elsewhere in which arts activity is similarly playing a part in the achievement of restoration, conservation, environmental, social and economic objectives.

3. Signage

The building will require signage both for statutory purposes and to assist public and staff to orientate use the facilities.

Statutory signage, such as fire exits and no smoking instructions, will need to align with the relevant legislation and local regulations. Wayfinding signage to assist users is discretionary and we suggest that the necessary signage is designed in consultation with the appointed lead artist and the Local Heritage Officer, both over colour and design, and the placement of signs in relation to the installed artworks.

NOTE: The officer project board noted that while the aesthetics of wayfinding signage is important (and the relationship with historical interpretation), equally there are other consultative inputs required, including the project accessibility forum, who have knowledge about design for accessibility, including ensuring signage works for individuals with learning Disabilities and other related issues.

Signage will be included in the historical interpretation element of the building, using text and illustration to set the context of the archive material displayed.

Signage will also include the acknowledgement of the support of funders or sponsors. Requirements in this respect will normally be included in the terms of a funding agreement.

By avoiding clashes of alignment, scale and colour, an appropriate 'hang' for signage contributes greatly to the overall aesthetic of a building.

4. Proposed art commissions

Locations for commissioned art work and other imagery are indicated in this strategy based on the information provided and on a site visit. Locations include what will be busy areas of the building in which different services and functions will be accommodated. The proposals contained in this strategy are according indicative, and further detailed negotiation with service providers, particularly on the ground and first floors, will be required to finally determine the utilisation of spaces and locations for the display of art works.

Primary location

4.1.1. Atrium area

The principal location for a public art commission is at the atrium area at the entrance to the Symington building (location 4+5+6¹). We recommend that the opportunity is created to commission a substantial artwork including the wall space and suspended in the atrium space which both identifies this key location as the gateway to the public facilities and services, and acts as an attractor to invite visitors to ascend to the first floor where the museum and library are located.

Depending on the eventual occupancy of the adjacent retail spaces, it may be necessary to consider how accommodation with the branding of shopfronts can best be managed in relation to the design and colour scheme of the entrance and atrium space

NOTE: The officer project board agreed with this being a high profile and important location. Use of the wall space, especially wall 4, which is least likely to clash with way-finding was generally acceptable.

A suspended commission may have excellent impact, but represents a high risk opportunity; both in terms of effectiveness and potential ineffectiveness/distraction potential and in terms of maintenance and cleaning. The Officer Board did not recommend a suspended piece was not considered, but that issues such as

¹ Location numbers refer to the hand-annotated architect's drawings provided to us by the Project Manager

maintenance will need to be addressed in decision making about the successful commission.

Secondary locations

4.1.2. Millennium Tapestry

We suggest that the U3A Harborough Millennium Tapestry should be securely hung and appropriately lit at location 7, the wall on the left at the entrance to the One-stop Shop area subject to negotiation with HDC customer services over the location and use of the computer stations adjacent. If location 7 is not available, substitute location 9.

*NOTE: The officer project board indicated that Location 9 was acceptable. Locations 7 and 8 **cannot be considered for art opportunities** until a coherent and complete proposal for the design and layout of public service delivery functions in the one-stop shop is first addressed.*

4.1.3. One-stop service shop (locations 8 and 9)

The space to the rear of the ground floor will house the One-stop Shop for Council services. We suggest that the available wallspace in this area of the building, locations 8 and 9 (or 7 if the Millennium Tapestry is at 9) is designated as the Symington Community Art Gallery, and fitted out with appropriate lighting, hanging and secure display arrangements suitable for the exhibition of two-dimensional artworks. We propose that local arts groups (including Harborough Art Club and Harborough Artists Cluster) are consulted to consider the possibility of the management of the Community Art Gallery being undertaken by community organisations, such that periodic changing exhibitions are produced in the gallery. We suggest that the opening exhibition should be the selected work from the art competition outlined under Activities below.

*NOTE: After consideration of the general principles of a “Community Art gallery” as discussed in the Strategy, which is supported by the Officer Board, officers wish to provide a clear steer that the preference is for this to be provided through use of communal and circulation areas; notably the central staircase and lobby areas **NOT** the one-stop shop.*

4.1.4. Office floors

The second and third floor office spaces offer the opportunity to utilise available spaces to display wall-hung archive photographs documenting the Symington's factory at various stages of its development and activity over the 150 years since its establishment in 1861. We understand that the Harborough Museum Collection, the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and other archives have documentary photographs relating to the history of the Symington's enterprise in Adam and Eve Street. Large-scale photographic prints derived from archive images, suitably

produced in durable materials, securely hung and appropriately lit, should be installed. We suggest that a thematic approach to the content is taken, for example relating to the original functions which took place on these floors. The available wall space will be restricted by the location of services, ducts, cable trunking and the like. A final determination of the opportunities for display of wall-hung images should be undertaken once the installation of services is completed.

NOTE: The officer board have a preference for larger, high impact pieces (eg wallpaper/large scale prints on feature walls) rather than smaller limited impact prints. These could be used to help name & wayfind locations, such as meeting rooms; eg. "The Liberty Room"

4.1.5. Stairway (location 18)

The central stair is a promising site for public art, but in our view, the likely restricted scale of financial resources available, that this area takes a lower priority than the atrium area. We suggest that the stair is included in the scheme of archive photographic imagery, perhaps a chronological scheme which ascends through the building from earlier to later periods of its history.

NOTE: See earlier comments in respect to use as Community Art Gallery.

4.1.6. Registrars (location 15, 20 and 23)

The Registrars section of the building includes several rooms with C19th wood panelling and a new-built ceremony room. The choice of imagery used in this section has to meet several criteria. The scale and style of art works should be appropriate to the character of the rooms. Content is required to be compliant with the preferences of the variety of cultures and religions of people likely to be using the Registrars section for ceremonies, which will include registration of births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships, and citizenship ceremonies. We suggest that an agreement is sought with Leicestershire County Council to select suitable items for loan from the County Art Collection housed at the Sherrier Centre, and that a periodic re-hang of art work is made in consultation with the collection staff.

4.1.7. Civic Suite (location 22)

The lobbies of the Civic Suite offer a further opportunity for the display of artworks. We suggest that the available display spaces, once known, are included in the proposals for a Community Art Gallery as suggested for locations 8 and 9 above.

NOTE: The Officer Board have made a clear recommendation that the display of art/civic dignitaries photographs etc is discussed at full council by HDC members, as the wider sensitivities around this space are not yet known. It is also important to reflect that the Council chamber will be utilised for wider community events in the

future, and needs to project a particular calibre of setting which community art may not support.

5. Activities

5.1.1. Public engagement – artists, residents and community arts organisations

The project should provide opportunities for artists and visitors to interact with and create a lasting interpretation of the building in response to its heritage and historical functions.

Accordingly, the programme should adopt a collaborative approach to engaging artists and arts organisations in encouraging members of the local community to participate in the regeneration and re-appropriation of this historical space. A series of artist led workshops, to include groups from the local community, including schools, youth settings, U3A etc will investigate the heritage, fabric and function of the building through creative expression, generating new art works for the building. These workshops will precipitate an ongoing relationship of the local community with the building as a place of generating creative ideas and products as an expression of the building's cultural heritage.

Community led workshops should be used to engage the public with the tapestry as it is welcomed to its permanent home.

The community gallery space in the One Stop Shop will provide opportunities for local artists to display their work, and to provide direct contact information to assist members of the public interested in purchasing works from the artists represented. If possible, a negotiated agreement with the Museum could be reached to handle the sale of artworks displayed, alongside the retail operation located on the first floor, with an appropriate level of sales commission agreed with the artists.

We suggest that if space allows, a Made in Leicestershire display case, provided by Creative Leicestershire is included in the retail offer to promote selected local makers and artists.

NOTE: The Officer Board wish to clarify that this refers specifically to retail aspect of the museum and not the shop retail units on the ground floor.

5.1.2. Opening exhibition

We suggest that agreement is sought with LCC Museums Service and De Montfort University to present an exhibition to mark the opening of the Symington building after its refurbishment. The exhibition could be held in one of the retail shop areas if not let at the time of opening, in one of the meeting rooms adjacent to the entrance area, if accessible to the public at the time of opening. The exhibition would feature historical items relating to the products of Symingtons together with contemporary examples from the Contour Fashion school at DMU. Finance to resource this exhibition could be included in the proposed Arts Council application.

5.1.3. Heritage Listening Posts

We suggest a project to gather and present the heritage of the building in sound. The project would be advertised locally to invite former employees and other people

associated with the Symington to attend an open day (or days) at which sound recordings would be made. Audio material from the 2003 'Contour and Cream' project, its Local Heritage Initiative successor the Lost Workforce, and recordings made in the 1980s, currently held by Harborough Museum, would be re-edited together with the new material and developed into a series of sound sequences which would be made accessible to visitors through 'listening posts' in the library or museum.

5.1.4. Art competition

We suggest that an art exhibition, on a selective basis, is organised on the theme of Sense of Place, and artists from the locality and the wider county are invited to submit work. The exhibition would be the initial presentation in the Community Art Gallery (see Secondary Locations above) for the opening of the building, and potentially in other locations, including the Civic Suite, dependent on availability and accessibility at the time of the opening of the building.

5.1.5. Interpretation sites

We recommend that, in developing the Symington Art and Interpretation Plan proposed in this strategy, every opportunity is taken to create interpretation features and other visitor facilities which are aligned with the vision and objectives. There is extensive scope for arts involvement with interpretation and information, furniture, signage, sites for information, and other elements of the visitor experience.

6. Legacies

The arts and cultural aspects of the restoration will leave several legacies:

- An iconic artwork which signals the project to the wider world;
- A documentary account of the restoration project;
- An enhanced identity for the cultural and public service functions of the building, with regards to its place set in the centre of a historic manufacturing community.

7. From strategy to realisation

The strategy sets out actions to be taken, structures to be created, and a plan and indicative budget to enable the objectives and ambitions for the arts in the Symington project to be achieved.

We recommend that once the necessary financial resources have been brought together, a detailed Symington Art and Interpretation Plan should be developed in line with the principles and objectives set out in this strategy.

Creation of the Symington Art and Interpretation Plan offers the opportunity to engage further local community consultation to ensure that the views and ambitions of local residents and businesses are taken into account in the implementation of the Strategy. We suggest that in this phase advantage is taken of the capacity of artists and the arts to facilitate community consultation.

7.1.1. Funding strategy

We recommend that the project Executive Advisory Panel approves an integrated Funding Strategy along the following lines.

Financial resources for the implementation of the arts and historical interpretation strategy are currently very limited. Even with the additional fundraising strategy set out below, there is a distinct risk that the scale of available resources will not be sufficient fully to meet the scale and scope of the building and the aspirations of its protagonist partners. The extent to which the plans can be implemented will be dependent on the availability of financial resources. We therefore recommend that a prioritisation approach is taken, as indicated in the strategy, so that available resources are utilised to best effect.

Time is short, and to seek to meet the planned handover of the building in December 2013 and occupancy in January 2014, it is necessary to take the earliest opportunity to seek additional funds from external sources to support implementation of the plans.

One of the more promising potential sources of additional funding is the Arts Council's Grants for the Arts programme. At present this can offer small grants with a six-week decision period (from accepting a complete application) for sums up to £10,000. The programme is being revised, with a raised ceiling for small grants of £15,000 and a decision period of 6 weeks being introduced from 1 July 2013. We recommend an application being made at the revised higher level at the earliest opportunity after 1 July 2013.

Other potential sources of funding include trusts and foundations with an interest in public art, and local corporate sponsors.

NOTE: The Officer Board supports the recommendation to proceed to seek Arts Council funding, but also wishes for additional work to be undertaken to define in greater depth, and with more appreciation for longer term funding risks, the strategy for maintenance and management of the commissioned artworks and Community Gallery.

7.1.2. Professional capacity

To ensure clarity and effectiveness of the implementation of the Arts Strategy, we recommend that the partners (HDC and LCC) should designate a senior staff member with responsibility for budget-holding and oversight of the arts elements of the project.

We recommend the following the following professional capacity should be put in place:

- Creative Leicestershire is appointed to manage the implementation of the strategy and lead artist commission, and to assist HDC in preparing an application to Grants for the Arts;
- A Lead Artist is commissioned to work on creative planning and delivery;
- An Arts Education and Interpretation specialist within the Museum Service is appointed to lead and implement the arts, education and interpretation programme.

7.1.3. Lead artist commission brief

We suggest that the lead artist brief to be developed by Creative Leicestershire in consultation with HDC and the key service partners should include the following elements:

- Create artwork for primary location on the wall and suspended in the atrium space (location 4+5+6);
- Advise on production and placement of photography (as below);
- Advise on colour and design for signage in the building and location coding for the office floors;
- Carry out workshops with the local community to investigate the heritage, fabric and function of the building through creative expression, generating new art works for the building;
- Work with service areas to ensure consistent and sustainable implementation of key elements of the art strategy.

7.1.4. Heritage interpretation

We recommend that the lead role on the content selection, production and placement of photographic prints in the building and the office floors, together with relevant interpretation and signage material, lies with the Local Heritage Officer or the Collections Team, who have the knowledge about what imagery is available. We suggest that the responsible officer consults with the Lead Artist over relevant issues including, for example, display, hanging and location colour-coding.

7.1.5. Listed building status

The Symington Building is listed Grade 2*. We understand that the exterior and any alterations or installations visible from outside are likely to be affected by this. The strategy proposes no alterations to the exterior of the building. The proposed installation in the atrium area is located at some distance from the street, but may attract the attention of the relevant authorities with whom, in which case, the proposals will need to be cleared.

7.1.6. Ongoing care and maintenance

Care and maintenance of the artworks is an essential element of the strategy and the capacity to do so needs to be enshrined in the practice of the organisation and its management. Normally commissioning of an artwork will include the requirement for a schedule of maintenance to be provided by the artist or their agent. The capacity to carry out such future maintenance needs to be included in the staff responsibilities at an appropriate level, or else arrangements made to bring in specialist contractors to carry out the necessary work at the prescribed intervals.

7.1.7. Ownership of art works

The ownership of commissioned works of art will lie, unless otherwise specified, with the Authority. Ownership of copyright and other intellectual property lies with the originating artist unless otherwise agreed. The specifics in each case will depend on

the terms of contract negotiated between artist (and/or agent) and commissioner. A mutually beneficial arrangement which is often applied is that the IP remains with the artist but the commissioner is given the right to exploit the copyright in the form of merchandising, and for promotional purposes.

7.1.8. Equalities assessment

We understand that an equalities assessment of the building development as a whole is to be undertaken, and therefore recommend that the proposed art and heritage elements which are finally included in the scheme are included in that process.

8. Future strategy

The strategy set out here is primarily determined by the available resources, the timescale of the refurbishment and the practical requirements of fundraising and commissioning artwork to enliven the building. It takes in to account the ongoing care and maintenance of the commissioned work, and proposes agreements being negotiated with local artist groups and the County Art Collection for a continuing programme of periodic changing exhibitions to include locally produced work. A continuing future programme of art activity and/or commissioning, aimed at sustaining the Symington Building as a public cultural resource could extend this strategy in to the future, given the necessary resources and an appropriate agreement with the Museum and Library, and relevant service areas. We suggest that, once the approved aspects of the proposed initial programme are in place, the opportunity is created to bring together local art interests with the Library, the Museum and the District Council, to consider possible ways in which a continuing art strategy could be supported, taking in to account the potential for finance, voluntary activity, local government services and the needs and aspirations of the populace.

9. Contact

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