



The Norwich Society

Conservation & Development Working Group

PUBLIC SCULPTURE IN NORWICH

A Way Forward



A Preliminary Discussion Document

August 2007

Public Sculpture in Norwich

They sit and read on it; eat their hamburgers on it; meet their friends and chat on it; let their children climb and play on it; some just sit and watch, others contemplate its meaning. Certainly to judge from its use, Norwich's latest piece of public art, Anne and Patrick Poirier's assemblage of forms on Hay Hill is a resounding success: sculpture that is useful, good to touch and to look at and also intrigues. This new work is directly allied to the statue of Sir Thomas Browne, but this, with Barbara Hepworth's *Sea Form* in the Castle gardens, is one of the few sculptures in the city in a *public* place. The Norwich Society's recent publication '*Public Sculpture in central Norwich*' highlights the diversity of sculpture in the city in form and period. But it also highlights the paucity of sculpture as a whole, in particular sited in key public places. Where it does exist it is often part of the decoration of a building, (e.g. the City Hall lions, Prospect House '*Untitled*' by Bernard Meadows). While these are excellent and contribute to the street scene, the numbers of free standing public works are few.

New sculpture would enliven and decorate the street scene, give a strong focus and form to key areas, and commemorate the city's past - emphasising the fame of its distinguished citizens and the notability of its range of famous trades and manufacturing across the centuries. Both these are important in bringing into prominence what might seem to be a reticence to celebrate the city's achievements and to link them to the present and to the future. New sculptural forms would mark the city out in cultural terms. New works could and should embrace the contemporary and cutting edge as well as more traditional forms. Norwich should become famous for the quality and originality of its public sculpture. It should be yet another reason for visiting the city. It would also bring pride to its citizens as well as delight and in some cases, amusement, while helping to highlight their rich legacy.

The traditional public sculpture, often isolated high on its plinth, can seem divorced from its surrounding and its public. Perhaps its time has passed. Sculpture is more immediate when it is at ground level, when it can be approached, touched, inspected in detail and close up, then it truly

becomes part of the street scene. This approach would bring sculpture to the people and help to make it theirs. Sculpture which has a dual use often has a higher degree of public acceptability, if it can be used as a seat or a shelter perhaps. If actively used then it is less likely to be vandalised. The choice of materials is key in making sculpture less vandal prone. They need to be sturdy and on the whole should avoid difficult to clean furrowed surfaces.

The execution and the installation of new sculpture is not cheap. Norwich does not want second rate forms but quality pieces in line with the excellence of the city. However in some instances the use of new materials can reduce cost. Not everything has to be in carved stone or cast in bronze. By using a range of new materials and techniques, as well as traditional ones, a rich diversity of art could be added to the street scene. This could enhance already favoured sites and give character and a sense of place to less favoured ones. Gone are the days of grim but worthy figures. Today sculpture as also be fun – a work which produces a smile on first acquaintance is already a long way on the road to public acceptance and success. If the aim is to commemorate some local quality or individual, to be in some way instructive, then a little light-heartedness will help to get the message across. The surest way to raise public resistance is to make people feel that they're somehow being done good to! But that approach is hopefully in the past. It is surely instructive that even so obscure and difficult a writer as Sir Thomas Browne can inspire an installation which is great fun *and* of use to the public at the same time. New sculpture would give expression to the creativity, energy and optimism within the city. It would boost civic pride and help to single out the city as a centre of excellence, proud of its past and confident of its future. It's an opportunity for the city, especially one of enhanced size and status, to seize with alacrity.

Subjects

People

Elizabeth Fry
Robert Kett
John Sell Cotman
John Crome
Thomas Buxton
Snap the Dragon (copy of or new version based on the original)
Sir James Edward Smith
Julian of Norwich (need not be figurative)
Boudica
Harriet Martineau
Amelia Opie
William Cadge, the Norwich surgeon
George Borrow
Thomas Bilney

None of the above need be a conventional statue on a plinth.

Snap the Dragon in his original colours would be a popular delight – perhaps placed in The Walk?

*That there is no public celebration of the artists of the Norwich School is a major omission
Why is the only statue of the Queen of the Iceni in London?*

Trades and Industrial Connections

Mackintosh's 'Quality Street'
Caley's Marching Chocolate
Start Rite Shoes children
Mustard Pot
Mustard Plants
Canary – in version forms
Wire netting
Thomas Jeckyll Sunflowers – Barnard, Bishop and Barnards decorative iron work
Boulton & Paul's output – wrought and cast iron – including many decorative garden items
– to full scale buildings in iron.
Brewery – Beer
Glass
Norwich Shawls
Insurance
Clocks

The ideas here could include a group of three metre high Mustard plants with their bright yellow flowers, an abstract piece made from wire netting (it was invented and manufactured in the city), the famous symbol of the Start Rite shoes children perhaps two metres high walking in one of the city's streets, a large Canary or several of them, not to copy the football club logo, but to commemorate their existence to the city over several centuries. All of the above subjects offer themselves for a literal or freer interpretation.

Abstract Forms

In many forms, materials -glass, metal, plastic, stone, marble, wood etc., in a wide range of colours and finishes and with infinite scope for both large and small pieces

Wall plaques and decoration

for smaller sites

Contemporary Glass section of the City wall – in height and proportion the same dimensions as the medieval city wall, but a contemporary version, to be lit from below at night, could be a long run of solid section, or fins of glass making up a sizable run. Could also feature the walls crenulations, the glass could be engraved, and the work could include a visitor interpretation centre.

Site, or plinth for ***‘Temporary or Changing Sculpture’*** perhaps displayed for one year only, following the successful Trafalgar Square example. This could give an opportunity for many young artists to display their work. It would also give scope for pushing the boundaries. Often highly unfavoured work becomes accepted, if given the right exposure and sufficient familiarity with it.

Sites

The Forum, near front of and/or in tree lined semi-circle on Theatre Street side

Traffic Island near John Lewis

In front of St Andrews Hall

The Lanes, Pottergate, area near St Gregory’s church

Newmarket Road

Castle Mound, or at Castle Meadow entrance

Station forecourt or entrance

Riverside – more than one site

Various sites on the Wensum River Parkway

King Street

Gentleman’s Walk

Queen’s Road

Roundabouts – list which ones – St Stephens

Which others ?

Sponsorship

To involve:

Norwich School of Art and Design

Arts Council England, East

Norwich and Norfolk firms

Agencies

Artists

Norwich City Council

VisitNorwich

European Grants

The Norwich Society needs an expert on determining which grants might be applied for, for each category. It seems an enormous field, and those in the know are obviously more likely to be successful.

Photographs and text by Roger Last

August 2007

List of Pictures:

- 1. Red Lion Street*
- 2. The Forum*
- 3. The Forum*
- 4. Pottergate - St Gregory's*
- 5. Pottergate*
- 6. Gentleman's Walk*
- 7. Orford Hill*
- 8. All Saints Green*
- 9. All Saints Green*
- 10. All Saints Green*
- 11. Prince of Wales Road*
- 12. Castle Meadow*
- 13. St Andrew's Plain*
- 14. London Street/Bank Plain*
- 15. Station Forecourt*
- 16. Station Forecourt*
- 17. Riverside*
- 18. Riverside*
- 19-22 Hay Hill*
- 23-26 Hay Hill*
- 27-30 Hay Hill*
- 31-34 Hay Hill*