

Art Best Placed

Sligo Local Authorities Public Art Plan **2004-2006**





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Art Best Placed

Sligo Local Authorities Public Art Plan 2004-2006

The History and Local Authority Context for the Per Cent for Art Scheme

The Department of Environment and Local Government Per Cent for Art scheme makes provision for up to one per cent of the overall construction cost of capital projects up to a ceiling of 964,000 for the commissioning of artworks.

The Department of Environment and Local Government's (DoEHLG) Scheme had been operating since 1986, and the Office of Public Works Scheme since 1978, when a review was undertaken by the Public Art Research Project. A report, produced by the Steering Group of the Research Project, was adopted by Government in 1997.

Prior to 1997 and the establishment of the County Arts Office, the Sligo Local Authorities had not utilised the Per Cent for Art scheme. The inaugural arts development programme introduced a pilot public art programme, *Placing Art* in 1997. The aim of the pilot programme was:

To promote quality in the built and rural environment through a public art programme intended to assist and inform the adoption of a public art policy, and to draw down available funding under the Per Cent for Art Scheme by Sligo Local Authorities. The objectives of *Placing Art* addressed some of the key recommendations and concerns of the Public Art Research Project. Those objectives were

- The development of management, administrative and support mechanisms within the Sligo Local – Authorities for ongoing commissioning under the Per Cent for Art scheme.
- To expand the range and nature of public artworks beyond those traditionally associated with public art, for example, film, performance, purchase and temporary work.
- To raise awareness of public art by introducing new local audiences to the programme through six Per Cent for Art scheme commissions.

Placing Art concluded in 2000 and was evaluated by the Public Art Steering Group. Their findings were drawn from a variety of sources including recorded interviews with the participating artists and focus group discussions with participating audience groups.

The concluding remarks of the Steering Group, in their report, stated, "From the evidence gathered through the evaluation process, it is clear that the aims and

objectives of the pilot process were successfully realised by delivering a wide range of quality artworks to new audiences through new management and partnership structures and mechanisms.... Placing Art has been a highly successful pilot scheme that has made a significant contribution to the development of public art in County Sligo. It has laid the foundation for the development of local authority policy for the Per Cent for Art scheme in the future.”¹

It was clear from the pilot programme that the most effective way for the Local Authorities to continue to implement the Per Cent for Art scheme would be to approach it in a policy-driven and strategic manner. By doing so, the Local Authorities would generate a framework for ongoing and balanced commissioning for rural and urban environments across the County.

Based on the findings of the pilot, the Evaluation Report contained thirty-six recommendations to the Local Authorities. A Strategy Group was established to consider these recommendations and to produce their own policy document on the future application of the Per Cent for Art scheme. Their report was submitted to the Local Authorities and was adopted by both Councils in 2001. ² This signalled the Local Authorities’ approval of the outcomes of Placing Art and their commitment to implement the scheme in the future.

The Strategy Group’s report made recommendations in four areas: Finance, Commissioning, Implementation and Delivery, and Audience. These areas may be considered as the framework of the Local Authorities’ policy on public art and the Per Cent for Art scheme.

In 2002 the immediate practical outcomes arising from the adoption of the Strategy Group’s report were:

- The succession of the post of Public Art Co-ordinator by that of Public Art Officer on a contract basis.
- The establishment of a Public Art Steering Group
- The commitment to produce a Public Art Plan

The Present National Context

In late 2002 the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism convened an Inter-Departmental Coordination Group on Public Art in order to prepare National Guidelines on Best Practice in the Commissioning of Art works for all

public bodies. National interim guidelines are expected in 2004 and they will be tested over a two-year in-practice trial period. These moves would seem to indicate that the Per Cent for Art Scheme, in its present form, will be revised and updated in recognition of recent developments in public art practice from various local authorities.

Vision Statement

The Sligo Local Authorities will draw on the Per Cent for Art scheme to increase the County’s collection of quality artworks available to citizens and visitors alike. The commissioning of artworks will be an integrated element of the Local Authority’s service provision for Housing and Infrastructure projects in urban and rural areas. The Local Authorities will support the involvement of artists in the development of public spaces by going beyond the purely functional. Public Art will become integral to the planning and development process engaged in by the Local Authorities. By raising the quality of artistic interventions in public spaces, people’s awareness will be increased of the relevance and importance of public space and the designed environment to their quality of life. Artworks that reflect the distinctiveness of a locality or a community will be encouraged. Commissions will be open to all art forms and multi-disciplinary work. An atmosphere of dialogue and openness will be cultivated between artists, commissioners and audiences. Employment opportunities will be made available for artists working locally, nationally and internationally. The actions generated by this Plan will result in increased public awareness of the potential of the Per Cent for Art scheme to define and improve public spaces, provide new cultural experiences at a local level and provide employment for artists.

¹ P. 44 A report on the evaluation of the pilot public art programme, Placing Art by the Public Art Steering Group, Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council, 2002

² A report by the Public Art Strategy Group on the future application of the Per Cent for Art Scheme by the Sligo Local Authorities, Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council, 2002

Section 1

Strategic Objectives

The Plan will be guided by five objectives. These objectives have been identified by means of the pilot programme's evaluation and the policy document produced by the former Public Art Strategy Group. The objectives provide continuity in the service of best practice for the next series of commissions.

- Commissioning Policy
- Quality Standards
- Audience engagement and education.
- Documentation and Public Information
- Monitoring and Evaluation

Commissioning Policy

In recognition that a generic or formulaic approach to commissioning will not serve every project, the Local Authorities will take an expansive approach to commissioning and selection, thus building upon commissioning practices to date. The standard range of commissioning practices includes: Open Competition, Limited Competition and Direct Invitation by nomination of selectors. The most appropriate commissioning method will be matched to the nature of the project and its budget.

The commissioning process, under the direction of the Public Art Steering Group, will at all times be open and fair.

In most cases the Local Authority will initiate the commission, generated by the availability of funding from the Per Cent for Art scheme through a capital project. Selectors will be appointed by the Public Art Steering Group for a number of projects and for a defined period of time in the life of the public art plan.

The Public Art Steering Group may invite curatorial direction in the development of a series of commissions.³

The Local Authority recognises the vital role that a community can play in identifying opportunities for the enhancement of their public spaces. Community initiatives can best be responded to through the Urban and Village Renewal Scheme as part of a consultation

process with the Local Authority. Communities are to be encouraged and supported in making proposals for the development of public spaces. Such consultations should be initiated as early as possible in the life of a project in order to integrate artistic processes into the fabric of the renewal proposal.

In order to respond to direct approaches from artists and the public to initiate public art projects, a bi-annual award will be established and adjudicated by the selectors

Quality Standards

In her foreword to the Local Authorities' policy document, Medb Ruane states that, "Quality suffered as the politics of second-best took hold".⁴ She is referring to commissioning practices that took hold within local authorities as a result of a lack of relevant expertise and a fear of taking artistic risks and generating controversy. Popular works were 'replicated' in many locations, thus compromising the originality factor of much public art.

The artworks commissioned under the Placing Art pilot scheme demonstrated that quality, originality and accessibility are attainable through innovative and sometimes conceptually challenging means. Those contemporary artworks were particularly successful in engaging the public in debate about the nature of public art.

It is the intention of the Sligo Local Authorities to uphold and increase quality standards in its commissioning practices.

As commissioners, the Sligo Local Authorities will seek to emphasise that originality is an essential factor in quality public art.

Through the ongoing involvement of artists-as-advisers, curators and arts professionals in the Plan, it is intended that quality processes and artworks will be realised.

³ Recommendation 12 of A report by the Public Art Strategy Group on the future application of the Per Cent for Art Scheme by the Sligo Local Authorities, Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council, 2002

⁴ p. 5 A report by the Public Art Strategy Group on the future application of the Per Cent for Art Scheme by the Sligo Local Authorities, Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council, 2002

Audience Engagement and Education

By virtue of the Per Cent for Art scheme's relationship to public ownership through capital projects, it is uniquely placed to offer new and accessible cultural experiences to both the general public and specific community groups. However, it is acknowledged that awareness of the Per Cent Scheme needs to be addressed in a proactive way.⁵

It is the intention of the Sligo Local Authorities to proactively engage local people, both broadly and specifically, with the artworks produced under the Scheme.

The practice of actively engaging audiences in the commissions series will be pursued through a variety of methods:

- Publicise the series of commissions through local press and radio
- Publicise each commission at various stages of its development, through local press and radio
- Specific and localised activity linked to particular commissions
- Invite artists to talk about their public art work at appropriate stages in the lifetime of a commission
- Contact schools in relation to individual commissions and approach teachers and the Education Centre on potential educational opportunities
- Promote strategic linkages between artists and statutory agencies and education bodies
- A broad information campaign about the Per Cent for Art scheme will be developed.

In recognition of the desire of some special interest groups to independently commission artworks of a commemorative nature, it is the intention of the Local Authorities to provide best practice guidelines on commissioning procedures, including the selection of artists, and planning permission requirements.

Documentation and Public Information

The production of high quality documentation for Placing Art was successful in raising awareness of the pilot programme locally and nationally. It has been regarded as research material by post-graduate students of architecture, planning and urban design, as well as by artists. The Local Authorities, as commissioners, wish to maintain their commitment to documenting each commission as fully as possible. Adequate resources

should be set aside to document the process of making each artwork.

Good documentary material can be utilised in a number of ways:

- To supplement educational projects and act as a classroom aid
- As public information in a publicity campaign
- As research material
- As material for evaluation
- As a benefit-in-kind to artists

Monitoring and Evaluation

The effectiveness and benefit of monitoring and evaluation can be seen in the work of the Placing Art Evaluation Report and subsequently the Strategy Group's policy document.

The Local Authorities have in place an evaluation framework for all service areas.

It is considered good practice for creative projects to put in place an evaluation process while projects are in train for the following reasons:

- to promote an ongoing dialogue in a constantly changing area of practice
- to inform change and development
- to identify and respond to the needs of project stakeholders.

The commissioners will ensure that evaluation continues to be an important part of the public art plan. Please see Section 3 where actions are outlined.

⁵ p. 19 A report by the Public Art Strategy Group on the future application of the Per Cent for Art Scheme by the Sligo Local Authorities, Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council, 2002

Section 2

The Per Cent for Art Scheme

The Plan will address three programme areas as follows:

1. The Per Cent for Art Scheme
2. Public/Private Commissions
3. Urban and Village Renewal

1. The Per Cent for Art Scheme

The Per Cent for Art Scheme is the largest programme area of the Plan because of the levels of funding available through Department of Environment and Local Government capital expenditure.

Aim

The Sligo Local Authorities intend to apply the Per Cent for Art scheme, in a planned and strategic manner, as an integral part of its' service provision in the areas of Housing and Infrastructure. Integration can be achieved, for example, through cooperative and collaborative processes with the Directorates and sections.

Objectives

Apply the recommendations contained in the policy document adopted by the Members, A report by the Public Art Strategy Group on the future application of the Per Cent for Art Scheme by the Sligo Local Authorities.

Commission a range of artworks across the DoEHLG's Per Cent for Art scheme's funding bands of small, medium and large allocations, on a rolling basis from 2004-2006.

Ensure an equal and geographic spread of commissions throughout the County and Borough Areas over the lifetime of the plan.

Continue to expand the range of commissions through different art forms and media, which would include literature, music, dance and performance.

Actions

- Identify six capital projects per year
- Appoint a curator/adviser by a process of selective tendering
- Provide contextual information and briefings to the curator/adviser and artists relating to the capital projects
- Deliver six commissions per year
- Publish the Public Art Plan

Desired Outcome

Exciting and accessible projects throughout the County and Borough will be made possible by utilising Per Cent for Art Scheme funds, adding to the collection of quality

artworks held by the Local Authorities. Employment opportunities for artists will be increased. Permanent and temporary projects will contribute to an improvement in public space and express the distinctiveness of localities. Audience awareness of public art will increase.

2. Public/Private Commissions

The Local Authorities recognise the impact of private sector developments on the built environment and public and civic spaces. There is a need to raise awareness and inform the private sector of issues and critical debates related to the design of public space and the potential for artists to address these issues. Developers should be encouraged to raise their design aspirations.

The Local Authorities also recognise the potential for maximising funding for public art through joint initiatives such as public/private commissions. Such initiatives would apply in two contexts:

1. A formal Public/Private Partnership led by the Local Authority
2. A private sector-led initiative such as a substantial commercial development associated with a Local Authority capital project

Aim

To encourage the private sector to consider the benefit of commissioning, and its relevance to planning for better public spaces.

Objective

To develop the awareness of developers, architects and stakeholders in the private sector of the current critical debates related to good design principles in the public art arena.

Actions

- Identify stakeholders in the local private sector
- Organise a forum for the local private sector
- Invite speakers to address the forum

Desired Outcome

The Local Authorities and the commercial/private sector would be encouraged to collaborate to improve public and civic spaces through the commissioning of public art.

3. Urban and Village Renewal

The objective of the Urban and Village Renewal Programme is to meet community needs through promoting environmentally sustainable development within towns and villages.

Objective

As part of the consultative process under the Renewal Scheme, communities will be encouraged and supported in developing proposals for the commissioning of artworks that may be funded through the Renewal Programme or part funded through the Per Cent for Art Scheme derived from capital projects.

Actions

The Public Art Officer will:

- Participate in the consultative process of the Renewal Scheme.
- Support the development of viable commission proposals
- Support the delivery of commissions where possible
- Identify sources of top-up funding from the Per Cent Scheme

Desired Outcome

Towns and villages would be encouraged to collaborate with the Local Authorities under the auspices of the Urban and Village Renewal Scheme in order to commission high quality works of art that reflect an area's cultural identity.

Section 3

Making it Happen

Management and Administration

The pilot programme put in place and tested the management and administrative support mechanisms that would be necessary for the Local Authorities to commission on an ongoing basis. These mechanisms were found to be essential to the successful implementation of the Per Cent for Art scheme. The support structures that have been retained and updated for the public art plan include: the appointment of a Public Art Officer, a Public Art Steering Group and the establishment of teams on a project by project basis.

The 'Implementation and Delivery' section of the policy document opens with the statement, "The Strategy Group recognised the complex set of relationships involved in the implementation and delivery of a commission as recognised by the evaluation report".⁶ Consequently, the present management and support structures have clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

The Role of the Public Arts officer is to:

- Draw down and manage Per Cent for Art Scheme funding on an ongoing basis
- Manage the commissioning process
- Liaise between artist, Local Authority and Community
- Liaise between sections and Directorates of the Local Authority
- Ensure the production of documentation and public information
- Participate in consultative processes between communities, villages and towns and the Local Authorities
- Liaise with strategic partners
- Report to the Public Art Steering Group
- Provide information to the Steering Group for the purposes of review and evaluation of the Commissions Series 2004-2005, and the Public Art Plan

The Public Art Officer is located within the Arts Office of the County Council and reports to the Strategic Policy

Committee 4 on Housing Policy/Social and Cultural Development.

The role of the Public Art Steering Group is outlined in Recommendations 7 & 16 of the policy document.⁷ It will oversee and assist the development of the Public Art Plan and the next series of commissions by:

- Making recommendations to the Public Art Officer and the Arts Office
- Approving the selection criteria and the selection process
- Appointing selectors
- Approving the appointment of curatorial advisers
- Overseeing the development of public relations and audience relations
- Annually reviewing the progress of the Series in relation to its objectives
- Annually reviewing the aims, objectives and actions of the Public Art Plan

Public art is a relatively new area of service delivery for the Local Authorities and it will therefore be necessary to raise staff awareness of the Per Cent for Art Scheme and commissioning practices through training. The Per Cent for Art Scheme funds are allocated from a number of Directorate budgets and it is desirable that staff from different Directorates apply the same management and administrative approaches to the Scheme. It is also important that staff are made aware of good practice in art project management. Training will be provided by the Arts Office, in co-operation with the Training Officer, to inform all relevant staff of good management and administrative practices in relation to the Per Cent for Art Scheme.

A team approach will be adopted to project delivery, where each project will have its own team to facilitate good management and communication across Directorates. This approach will serve to build up a level of in-house experience of public art project management which will facilitate good long-term management of the Per Cent for Art Scheme.

⁶ p.18 A report by the Public Art Strategy Group on the future application of the Per Cent for Art Scheme by the Sligo Local Authorities, Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council, 2002

⁷ pp. 15 & 16 A report by the Public Art Strategy Group on the future application of the Per Cent for Art Scheme by the Sligo Local Authorities, Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council, 2002

Funding

The Department of Environment and Local Government Per Cent for Art Scheme will provide the majority funding for the commissioning of public art by the Local Authorities.⁸

Funding criteria for the Per Cent for Art Scheme are defined by the DoEHLG in Circular LS 1/97. The Local Authorities are obliged to observe these criteria and all subsequent guidelines that are circulated by the DoEHLG.

Capital project spending, from which the Per Cent for Art Scheme is derived, is applied for by the Housing, Roads, Water Supply/Main Drainage Sections of the Local Authority and requires approval by the DoEHLG before works can proceed.

Sligo County Council has funded the post of Public Art Officer in order to draw down and manage the Per Cent for Art scheme funds in accordance with Recommendation 4 of the policy document.⁹

Provision will be made in the Local Authorities Annual Budget for the ongoing maintenance and archiving of artworks as necessary, in accordance with Recommendation 6 of the policy document.¹⁰

Funding for documentation and publicity material on works commissioned will be drawn from Per Cent Scheme funds on a project-by-project basis.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This strategic objective will be delivered by means of a review process that will focus on three strands:

1. The Aims and Objectives of the three Programme Areas of this Plan
2. The Objectives of the Unravelling Development series
3. The overall management and administrative mechanisms that support the Per Cent for Art scheme and this Plan

The findings of an internal review will be presented to the Steering Group annually for discussion and assessment.

Strategic Partners

A number of strategic partners were found to be an important element to the success of Placing Art. Partners ranged from local agencies such as Sligo Leader

Partnership to the Arts Council and the Department of Environment and Local Government.

As well as continuing links with former partners, strategic linkages will be developed in order to support the series of commissions. Potential partners at local level might include the Education Sector, at primary, secondary and tertiary level.

At national level, links will continue with the Arts Council and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, initially through the membership of the Public Art Officer on a panel of expert Advisers to the Inter-Departmental Coordination Group on Public Art, and with the Department of Environment and Local Government.

Links will continue to develop with Local Authority public art specialist staff, such as Wexford County Council's Public Art Coordinator.

International links will also be explored with a view to considering differing models of practice for commissioning.

⁸ Please see Appendix 1 for definition of the Per Cent for Art Scheme

⁹ p. 14 A report by the Public Art Strategy Group on the future application of the Per Cent for Art Scheme by the Sligo Local Authorities, Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council, 2002

¹⁰ p. 14 A report by the Public Art Strategy Group on the future application of the Per Cent for Art Scheme by the Sligo Local Authorities, Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council, 2002

