

Artist Commission, Rochford Town 2019-20

Budget: £10,000
Deadline: Monday 27 May 2019 (1pm)
Interviews: Friday 7 June 2019

Introduction

For eleven years Essex Cultural Diversity Project (ECDP) has been working closely with many different organisations, bringing together artists, museums, libraries, performers and writers with local authorities and commissioners to significantly improve and enhance the artistic and cultural diversity of the area, ensure that excellence is thriving, and that cultural integration and understanding is supported and enhanced through arts and cultural activity. This is more important today than it has ever been since ECDP was established.

ECDP is now an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) with a key role to play across Essex and the East of England in continuing to support diversity in arts and cultural practice. Our strategy to achieve this is through a programme of exciting but challenging place-based commissions for artists to work in areas of Essex where there are opportunities to explore diversity through their practice. For 2019-20 we are focusing on rural or smaller areas/towns that do not tend to see a lot of artists commissioning or activity, particularly focusing on more diverse arts/cultural practice. This commission is to be focused on the historic town of Rochford in what is a largely rural District to the south east of Essex bordering the urban area of Southend-on-Sea.

Rochford Town Introduction

Rochford is the main town and administrative centre of the District of Rochford a largely rural area to the south east of Essex, bordering the urban Borough of Southend-on-Sea. Much of the District's 65 square miles is designated as Green Belt with significant areas given over to farming. Along with Rochford the District also includes the towns of Rayleigh and Hockley, along with a number of villages including Paglesham, Ashingdon and Canewdon. Rochford Town, as well as the wider District is relatively affluent with a low unemployment rate and a significant proportion of older people (by 2030 it is anticipated that 26% will be over 65 – 4th highest in the country).

Rochford has a wealth of history and heritage that is relatively unknown even to local populations including the neighbouring Southend, with 100s of listed buildings and sites spanning 1000s of years. The town takes its name from Rochefort, Old English for Ford of the Hunting Dogs. Bizarrely it is not named after the nearby river Roach but instead the river (which was originally called the Walfleet meaning "Creek of the foreigners") was renamed the Roach in order to fit the name of Rochford i.e. a ford over the River Roach! The town has been formed around a crossing of four main streets named simply after the main points on the compass. At the centre is the Market Square which is still the centre of the town today with a weekly market and a number of shops. The historic pub in the Market Square is now closed but is to be re-opened as a community space with support from the Government's Open Doors programme which aims to match landlords struggling to find tenants for their empty properties with community groups looking for space. One of the oldest surviving buildings is the 'Old House' in Rochford with original building starting in 1270, restored and now owned by Rochford Council, the building is used for a range of events.

Rochford has a history of non-conformist and alternative movements and traditions. These include The Peculiar People (or the United Brethren) which was a Christian movement established in Rochford that opposed the formal nature of the established church and service and did not agree with medical assistance for illness. There is also a local custom dating back to the 1600s often referred to as the 'Lawless Court' or 'Whispering Court' in which tenant farmers would pay rent and commit their allegiance to the Manor on one midnight each year – a unique Rochford tradition. Smuggling was also a major 'industry' throughout Rochford's history with many creeks and inlets allowing smugglers to bring goods ashore, while escaping the attention of excisemen and avoiding paying import taxes. Paglesham was known to have been a major centre of smuggling activity.

Despite the close proximity and connections to Southend, which is a major destination attracting over 6m visitors each year, very few visitors venture to Rochford as part of their visit. The increasingly popular London Southend Airport sits largely within the Rochford District with flights to all over Europe and North Africa. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) owns Foulness Island which is separated by the mainland by a number of narrow creeks and it has been an operational testing site for munitions (missiles and torpedoes) since 1916 – now run by its contractor QinetiQ – it is necessary to get special permission to visit the Island due to the top secret nature of the operations there.

In 2020 Rochford District Council is organising a celebration of a number of anniversaries and major events with the aim of attracting a higher number of visitors to the District and raising the profile of the area's history and culture. Rochford Council has created a Tourism Forum to oversee and curate the programme which will include a major event in partnership with the RSPB at Wallasea Island. 2020 marks the 200th anniversary of the launch of HMS Beagle - one of the most famous ships in history - circumnavigating the globe and being heavily associated with the voyages of Charles Darwin. HMS Beagle was finally decommissioned by the Royal Navy in 1845 when she was transferred to the Coastguard and repurposed as a watch vessel stationed at Paglesham, where she ended her illustrious career and where her remains are believed to be buried in the estuary mud.

2020 is also important in Rochford for the following anniversaries:

- The 1000th anniversary of Ashingdon parish church said to be built in 1020 by the order of the King, the famous 'Canute the Great' – ruler of England, Denmark and Norway
- The 540th anniversary of the original Rochford Hall, once one of the largest houses in Essex and reconstructed around 1480, it was also home to the Boleyn family from 1515 with connections to Henry VIII
- The 440th anniversary of the Canewdon Witch Trials - a ten-year period which began in 1580 during which three women were indicted for witchcraft earning Canewdon a reputation as one of the most haunted places in Essex
- The 50th anniversary of the Rayleigh Windmill opening to the public in 1970 following a restoration of this 19th century landmark
- The 750th anniversary of the construction of the first parts of The Old House in Rochford in 1270 built of a timber frame with wattle and daub panels made from a mixture of mud, dung, reeds and rushes gathered from the River Roach, with the wood supplied from nearby Hockley Woods.

Despite the plans for 2020 the District is relatively underserved in terms of arts, cultural activity and programming, and this is one of the reasons that ECDP is interesting in working in the area. Rochford District was eligible for the recent Arts Council Creative People and Places programme aimed at areas of low arts engagement - although a bid did not emerge from local partners. ECDP as an Essex-based NPO is keen to support arts and cultural development across all areas of Essex including areas of low engagement, and particularly to explore the concept of 'diversity' in many different settings and contexts. Rochford, compared to neighbouring areas including Southend and Basildon, is not particularly culturally or ethnically diverse.

The Commission

ECDP has a key role to explore the concept of 'diversity' across Essex, working with a wide range of partners and providing opportunities for artists and creative practitioners from diverse background and contexts. Through our commissioning programme ECDP aims to support the production of challenging work that responds to specific places and the local context (place-based), as well as reflecting on national themes and issues around diversity. This is the first commission in what will be a year (2019-20) of ECDP developing its work in rural and smaller urban areas of Essex. We are aware that these areas tend not to see the same levels of artistic and cultural activity as more urban areas. Our experience of previous projects such as *Kavaad Picnic*, *Music on the Train* and *Festival of Thetford & the Punjab* (see our website essexcdp.com) have demonstrated how effective commissioning artistic and creative programming can be in terms of engaging audiences and showcasing diverse arts.

For this commission, and given the Rochford 2020 ambitions for increasing awareness of the District's heritage and culture (and relevant to the planned Darwin related *Beagle* celebrations in Rochford), we are keen for an artist (or artists) to focus on the concept of 'exploration' in Rochford Town and the surrounding rural area. Rochford District Council and its partners want to see more people exploring Rochford in the future, including visiting from Southend and London. How the theme of 'exploration' is developed is entirely up to the appointed artist (or artists) – this may be focusing on relevant local stories or myths, natural environment or watercourses (the River Roach is utilised for exploration by boat out to the Thames Estuary and North Sea), or perhaps working with older people, young people or specific community organisations on relevant local issues.

We do not expect the appointed artist (or artists) to engage directly with the Rochford 2020 programming which is being led by Rochford Council, although this is of course an opportunity should the artist(s) want to pursue this.

As part of the commission we would like the appointed artist(s) to work with at least one local community or voluntary organisation and to engage volunteers in developing the work of the commission. It is important for ECDP and its partners that the artistic process creates opportunities for people to learn new skills, gain confidence and have enjoyable experiences. This is an important element for ECDP and we would expect to see at least 10 people volunteering their time supported by the commissioned artist.

Support throughout the Commission

The commissioned artist can count on the ongoing support, advocacy and advice of the ECDP Creative Director throughout, as well as other ECDP staff/associates as necessary. ECDP staff will liaise with the commissioned artist to establish a timetable for delivery and identify times for recording digitally the ongoing creative process (this is as important for ECDP as the final outcomes in terms of understanding community engagement with the process).

Budget and Promotion

The budget available for the commission is £10,000 (to include any VAT). This will cover artist fee, travel and materials. The need for promotion, advertising and web resources can be discussed with ECDP, therefore we do not expect the £10,000 to cover anything related this. ECDP would however like the appointed artist(s) to have an active Twitter account so that this can be utilised to promote events and performances relating to the commission (see [@essex_cdp](https://twitter.com/essex_cdp) for previous ECDP tweets and re-tweets).

Promotion for the commission can be undertaken in partnership with ECDP and other partners as appropriate. ECDP will promote the commission and related activity on the ECDP website and support the process throughout on social media (including Twitter and Instagram). ECDP hopes that the commission will attract significant numbers from the local community both in terms of active engagement and audience,

as well as attracting audiences from further afield (where possible/appropriate). ECDP and its partners would expect to see good levels of audiences online (not necessarily exclusively during the actual commission).

Funding must be committed and claimed from ECDP prior to April 2020.

Tracking Outcomes

It is very important for ECDP as an Arts Council England funded National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) that we can report on all of our activities effectively and accurately. The commissioning of artist(s) for 2019-20, of which Rochford is the first, is the key element of our NPO programme and we expect there to be important outcomes which we will work with the commissioned artist to record and track. ECDP would also want the appointed artist(s) to be aware of and engage with the concept of the 'Creative Case for Diversity' throughout the commission (ECDP is happy to discuss this with the commissioned artists). In summary we would expect the appointed artist(s) to record both quantitative and qualitative information to support ECDP in capturing outcomes (as far as is possible). These include:

- numbers of 'sessions' and a list of workshops/events/meetings that took place as part of the commission
- numbers of project participants or volunteers
- numbers of audiences who attended events (who were not direct participants) – i.e. 'live' audiences
- any information on digital audiences (i.e. those engaging or viewing work online) where this is possible to get
- Reflections on how the commission has impacted on the practice of the appointed artist(s), and how the commission may have impacted on the beneficiaries (volunteers/audiences) and the place (i.e. Rochford Town)
- Any recorded feedback from participants/beneficiaries or partner organisations involved
- Photos from workshops, events and the artwork/performances (much of this can be shared on the ECDP website and social media)

Environmental Sustainability

ECDP is committed to minimising its potential for negative impacts on the environment. As an NPO we also have a leadership role in the arts/cultural sectors and consider that ECDP can have a positive impact on environmental sustainability as we have for issues relating to ethnic and cultural diversity. This is relevant to the commissioning programme for artists and we are keen that the all artist(s) interested in this commission for Rochford Town consider how they will reduce the impact of their work on the environment. For example, the use of materials – consider whether they are recyclable, made from recycled materials, or can be repurposed after the commission. The aim of this will be to reduce the waste from commissions/exhibitions and the use of non-recyclable materials where possible. Artists should consider where possible choosing accessible locations for activities and events – locations that can be easily accessed by public transport/walking as well as by older people.

Commission Panel

ECDP will convene a panel from partner organisations who will interview the shortlisted artists for this Rochford Town commission (see below). This group will act as a Panel throughout the commission process and will be able to offer some insight, information or contacts for the appointed artist(s). We will discuss with the appointed artist(s) at the contract stage before the work has begun what kind of ongoing liaison with the Panel may be required (or otherwise). This may be a formal meeting half-way through the commission, or possibly at the end of the commission to support the capturing of information and evaluate successes and/or challenges.

Responding to this ECDP Commission Opportunity

Please respond via email to jo@essexcdp.com including the following:

- Outline artistic and community engagement concept for the commission, including the proposed community engagement process and what art form(s) will be the focus
- CV with relevant previous commissions and work (no more than 4 sides of A4). Please provide links to relevant websites and social media/media
- Outline budget breakdown showing how you would utilise the £10,000 and approximate timeline for the work. It is important that all of the funded work takes place within the 2019-20 financial year, so please be clear on availability and resources to complete the commission in time

Please ensure that proposals are received by 1pm Monday 27 May 2019 - Send to jo@essexcdp.com

Interviews will be held on Friday 7 June 2019 – Interviews will be held in Rochford and will include an opportunity for a 15-minute presentation on your Proposal. If you are shortlisted for an interview, we will let you know by the Friday 31 May 2019.

Please note, if your application is not shortlisted in this instance we will not be able to provide feedback due to the number of applications.

For further information on Essex Cultural Diversity Project please see:
www.essexcdp.com

