

Artist Commission 2020-21: Chelmsford & Essex2020 - Year of Science and Creativity

Budget: £10,000
Deadline: Friday 11 September 2020
Interviews: Wednesday 30 September 2020

Commission start date: Mid October 2020
Commission end date: 31 March 2021

Introduction

Working in close partnership with Chelmsford City Council, Essex Cultural Diversity Project is inviting proposals for a new artist commission, as part of our NPO commissioning programme funded by Arts Council England. We are looking for creative responses to the rich story of Chelmsford as a city and district, its heritage and ambitions for the future. A key aim of this place-based commission is to celebrate diversity, as well as harness and explore digital innovation as part of *Essex2020 - Year of Science and Creativity*. We are particularly interested in looking at Chelmsford's rivers and waterways; how they connect people and places, and form an integral part of the area's environment and cultural, agricultural and industrial history.

Since 2007 Essex Cultural Diversity Project (ECDP) has been bringing together artists, museums, libraries, performers and writers with local authorities and commissioners to improve and enhance artistic and cultural diversity, ensure that excellence is thriving, and that cultural integration and understanding is supported through arts and cultural activity. ECDP is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) working across the East and South East of England to support diversity in arts and cultural practice. ECDP's programme of commissions provides an opportunity for artists to explore diversity through their work and develop their socially engaged and participatory practice, as well as capture the 'spirit of place', connect communities and give people a platform to tell their stories in their own words.

Chelmsford City Council plays a central role in the city's arts, heritage and cultural provision. The Council runs Chelmsford Museum, Sandford Mill Museum and Hylands Park, Chelmsford Theatres, and many green and open spaces across the city and wider district. The Council established *Ignite Chelmsford* in 2018, a new cultural forum to establish a cohesive voice for those involved in arts, culture, heritage and the creative industries. Chelmsford City Council's *Shared Cultural Vision 'Towards 2040'* sets out the ambition to be a city that celebrates individuality and diversity, and to be a culturally diverse and inclusive place promoting unity, where all genders and generations can interact and thrive.

The Commission

Given that *Essex2020 – Year of Science and Creativity* is a key driver for this commission we are particularly interested in projects that use 'digital' as a creative tool, to reach new audiences and help participants engage and connect, and/or engage creatively with science and technology more broadly.

Chelmsford City Council and ECDP are also very aware of the increasing interest in the river and waterways, their importance to the area's cultural, agricultural and industrial heritage, as well their significance as special environments, connective networks, and to future place-shaping and development.

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 backgrounds and contexts. Through our commissioning programme ECDP aims to support the production of challenging work that responds to specific places and the local context, as well as reflecting on national themes and issues around diversity. We are keen to see greater use of 'digital' to achieve this, and are keen to see creative responses to how this can happen (particularly relevant given the current prominence of, and reliance on, digital tools across society, business and education).

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. In terms of geographic coverage, artistic responses can be focused on the City of Chelmsford as well as the wider district (which includes rural areas, towns and villages) – we are leaving this up to the appointed artist to decide what is most relevant to their creative approach.

Chelmsford City and District – Context for the Commission

Chelmsford is England's newest city, granted city status to mark the Diamond Jubilee of Elizabeth II in 2012. Located centrally in the middle of Essex, the district of Chelmsford incorporates Broomfield, Great Baddow, Galleywood, Writtle, Moulsham, Widford and Springfield, including Springfield Barnes, now known as Chelmer Village, which incorporates the major new developments at Beaulieu.

As well as the headquarters of Essex Police, Essex County Council and Chelmsford City Council, as the 'county town' the city is home to a range of national and international companies including M&G Group, Teledyne e2v and Battelle UK. The continuing importance of Chelmsford as an employment centre is demonstrated by the fact that the number of "in" commuters (mostly from other parts of Essex) almost balances the number of workers commuting into London.

Credited as 'the birthplace of Radio', Chelmsford is perhaps best known for its pioneering role in communications technologies, manufacturing and engineering. However, Chelmsford's identity is also built on its waterways and its role as an agricultural and market town.

Two main rivers flow through the city centre, the Can and the Chelmer, which join together towards the east of the city to form the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation, which heads out towards Maldon before flowing into the tidal waters of the Blackwater Estuary at Heybridge Basin. The Chelmer comes from the north from its source near Thaxted, while the Can comes from the West from Writtle where it separates from the River Wid.

Rivers have been central to development of Chelmsford, both in terms of early settlement and later through the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation, which enabled an expansion of trade and brought materials to the heart of the city, transforming its traditional agricultural industries. Several local companies were at the forefront of agricultural engineering, as well as rope makers, cricket bat and packaging manufacturers working with natural materials.

In 1898 local millers Marriages commissioned a new steam powered roller mill to replace grinding stones, and they are still milling wheat from local farms only a few miles outside the city. In Chelmsford agricultural and industrial innovation has strong local roots. George Marriage helping to establish the Organic Food Federation and Writtle University College (one of the first institutions to teach agriculture and horticulture -

<https://writtle.ac.uk/UG-Agriculture>) are actively researching sustainable production and the provision of affordable nutritious food through The School of Sustainable Environments.

An ongoing project of relevance to waterways is *Paths to Prosperity*, which is encouraging greater exploration of routes that connect a range of locations (towns, railway stations etc) across the county of Essex to coastal areas, including river walks and cycle routes. New geocache trails are also being created to encourage further exploration of routes to the coast.

Recognising the importance to residents of the city's green spaces and waterways, the council has a Waterways working group and also liaises with the local charity Chelmer Canal Trust <http://www.chelmercanaltrust.co.uk/cct.htm>. The Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation was utilised as a commercial freight route until 1972 and remains increasingly popular for leisure use with some historic locks along the way. Run by Essex Waterways www.waterways.org.uk/essex_waterways the whole length is a conservation area and includes diverse habitats including a rare chalk site at Sanford Mill, originally a medieval water mill and home of a (now disused) water treatment plant.

Being both the county town and for many years a thriving market town, Chelmsford's role as a hub remains a key part of its identity with the city centre serving many local villages and its waterways popular routes of connection for cyclists, walkers, canoeists and wildlife. This commission aims to connect with this heritage while firmly looking forward to the future.

About Essex2020

Launched as part of *Essex2020 – Year of Science & Creativity*, this commission has an opportunity to help connect Chelmsford communities to the city's heritage in innovation, its visions for the future, as well as engage audiences in new technologies and topics of debate.

Essex2020 is a year-long, county-wide celebration of science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) bringing together hundreds of individuals and organisations to shine a light on the county's enterprising past and inspire an even brighter future for science and creativity in Essex. This county-wide celebration of STEAM aims to inspire more people and communities to learn about (and get involved in) science and creativity, encourage a sense of pride and well-being, with new opportunities to discover more about science and creativity, and involve people of all ages in learning through collaboration and participation.

Chelmsford City Council are key partners in the Essex2020 programme, working with others including Anglia Ruskin University (with a campus in Chelmsford) who are also major partners in the British Science Festival. The Festival was to be a key part of Essex2020, but will now take place in Chelmsford during 2021, with much of the activity on the University Riverside Campus (7–11 September 2021). Essex2020 is an opportunity for science, art and innovation to meet in inspiring and creative ways - something we will be looking for in this commission.

Application process and support

The successful artist(s) will be selected by a panel of representatives from ECDP, Chelmsford City Council and Essex2020. A shortlist will be made from the received applications based on how well they meet the commission criteria and respond to this brief, and these will be invited to interview to talk further about their proposal before a final decision is made. The commission will be managed by ECDP and the commissioned artist will receive ongoing support, advocacy and advice from ECDP, Chelmsford City Council and Essex2020 throughout.

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

The commission budget is £10,000 and will be treated as a grant. This is inclusive of all expenses and must therefore cover fees, travel, materials and marketing. Some promotion and advertising will be undertaken by ECDP and Chelmsford City Council, at their cost, and this will be discussed on appointment. Payments will be made in instalments, on receipt of invoice, and subject to progress against achieving agreed activity as outlined above. If this is a joint commission one artist/organisation will need to be the project lead and all payments will be made to them.

Promotion for the commission can be undertaken in partnership with ECDP and Chelmsford City Council. ECDP will promote the commission and related activity on the ECDP website and support the process throughout on social media (including Twitter and Instagram). The commission will also be promoted and publicised through Essex2020 website and social media. 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 2021.

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 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. Chelmsford)
- 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 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.

Responding to this Commission Opportunity

To apply for this commission please email Jo Nancarrow at info@essexcdp.com and include the following:

- An outline of the artistic concept for the commission, including the proposed community engagement process, intended audience, connection to Essex2020 and the project's potential legacy (no more than 1 side of A4).
- A brief description on why you are interested in this commission at this time, how your project promotes diversity and any relevant connections with Chelmsford (no more than 1 side of A4).
- A biography and CV with relevant previous work (no more than 2 sides of A4). Please include links to relevant websites and social media/media.
- An outline budget breakdown showing how you would utilise the £10,000. It is important that all of the funded work takes place within the 2020-21 financial year, so please be clear on availability and resources to complete the commission in time
- An approximate timeline for the work.

Please ensure that proposals are received by midnight on 11 September 2020. Please send your proposals to Jo Nancarrow at info@essexcdp.com

Interviews will be on held on Wednesday 30 September 2020 in Chelmsford, 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 Monday 21 September 2020.

For further information on Essex Cultural Diversity Project visit www.essexcdp.com