



Artist Commission 2023 Bourne Mill and Colchester

Essex Cultural Diversity Project and the National Trust invite proposals from creative practitioners for a new commission that will respond to Bourne Mill, the National Trust's site in Colchester, Essex. For this commission we are specifically looking for a project that will raise awareness of biodiversity, support positive attitudes and behaviours around Climate Action and the environment, and engage with new and under-represented audiences. The project will respond to the rich history, cultural heritage and nature of Bourne Mill, as well as the wider Bourne Valley area and Colchester district.

Budget: £15,000
Deadline: 15 May 2023
Interviews: w/c 29 May 2023

Commission Start Date/Induction: mid-June 2023
Audience Engagement Activity to take place from end of June to end of October half term
Commission End date/final report: December 2023

Full Creative Brief

About this Commission

Essex Cultural Diversity Project and the National Trust are working together to broaden access to inclusive and diverse arts, culture and heritage across the Trust's Essex and Suffolk Countryside portfolio of properties, of which Bourne Mill is one.

The National Trust have hosted three commissions to date as part of Essex Cultural Diversity Project's NPO commissioning programme, which provides an opportunity for creative practitioners to create new work, explore diversity and develop their socially engaged and participatory practices. Projects aim to capture the spirit of place and connect with diverse communities.

Key objectives of this commission are to:

1. Engage families and adults with nature across Colchester using the five nature connection pathways: Contact, Emotion, Compassion, Meaning, and Beauty, as defined by Derby University (read more at <https://www.derby.ac.uk/blog/5-ways-closer-nature/>).
2. Raise awareness of biodiversity within the Bourne Valley and Bourne Mill itself.
3. Explore small but mighty approaches to supporting positive behaviours around Climate Action.
4. Enrich and enhance engagement with new and under-represented audiences in Colchester whilst exploring shared approaches to positive environmental behaviours.

Through the commission we seek to raise the profile of Bourne Mill as a site that can inspire the people of Colchester to champion both cultural heritage and wildlife. Key themes for Bourne Mill relate to the fulling and corn milling industry, which link to key individuals including Sir Thomas Lucas as well as the Elizabethan Dutch refugee community who shaped the landscape around them. The building was intended as a status symbol with the Lucas family's coat of arms incorporated into the architectural style, built in that location due to Bourne Spring and the St John's Abbey Mill ponds.

There are opportunities to create new interpretation and narratives around the nature and historic themes, as well as considering the Mill and Bourne Valley's wider significance to wildlife across urban Colchester, engaging new audiences in the process.

Post-pandemic, Bourne Mill's core audience has shrunk to National Trust members for guided experiences and we are now once again reaching out into the locale within the city's districts. The focus is very much set on growing the Trust's community engagement through outreach and connecting people with the myriad of benefits that nature in the city can bring.

As part of the commission we would like the appointed creative practitioner(s) to work with at least three local community or voluntary organisations, and engage volunteers in developing the work of the commission. It is important that the artistic process creates opportunities for people to learn new skills, gain confidence and have enjoyable experiences. We are keen to see significant engagement with local communities and, where possible, visitors too.

Space is available at Bourne Mill so we would be happy to see some activity take place there, bringing people into the space (through a visit, workshop, exhibition or performance for example). However, off-site engagement and building nature awareness is of greater importance in this commission, as the site currently has limited access.

Please read the supporting information below for more details about the commissioning partners and the history of Bourne Mill, as this should enrich your understanding of the site, and may help you with your proposal.

How to Respond to this Commission Opportunity

To apply for this commission please email jo@essexcdp.com and include the following:

- An outline of the artistic concept for the commission, responding to the full creative brief, including the proposed community engagement process, intended audience and 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 other relevant information (no more than 1 side of A4).
- A biography / CV with relevant previous work (no more than 2 sides of A4). Please include links to relevant websites and social media.
- An outline budget breakdown showing how you would utilise the £15,000. It is important that all of the funded work takes place within the 2023-24 financial year, so please be clear on availability and resources to complete the commission in time.
- An approximate timeline for the work.
- A completed Commissioning Monitoring Form: <https://bit.ly/commission-monitoring-doc>

We are committed to making our application process more accessible, and can be adaptable if the above procedures don't quite work for you. We therefore welcome proposals in other formats, such as a video or audio version of your proposal, following the format above, or a 1-2-1 video or telephone call to talk through your proposal (we will use the prompts as listed above).

Please ensure that proposals are received by midnight on Monday 15 May.

Supporting Information

About Essex Cultural Diversity Project (ECDP)

<https://essexcdp.com/>

Since 2007 Essex Cultural Diversity Project 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 has a key role to explore the concept of 'diversity' across the East of England and beyond, 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 supports 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.

About the National Trust

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/>

The National Trust is one of the UK's largest Charities founded in 1895 by three people who saw the importance of the nation's heritage and open spaces and wanted to protect them for everyone to enjoy. Over 120 years later the National Trust looks after special places throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland ensuring that they are accessible for everyone, for ever. The charity's Strategy is currently focussing on Everyone Welcome and Climate Action.

The National Trust owns and looks after coastline, forests, woods, fens, beaches, farmland, moorland, islands, archaeological remains, nature reserves, villages, historic houses, gardens, mills and pubs. Places and sites are restored, protected and opened up so that everyone can experience them. For the Trust, conservation has always gone hand-in-hand with public access. In total the Trust manages:

- 780 miles of coastline
- Over 248,000 hectares of land

- Over 500 historic houses, castles, ancient monuments, gardens and parks and nature reserves

The National Trust is constantly developing its engagement programmes and marketing approach to engage a greater diversity of visitors and volunteers, as well as aiming to increase the diversity of interpretation and curatorial approaches to their properties and collections. Collaborating with organisations such as ECDP is core to this approach, aiming to explore new concepts and reach new communities who may not have engaged with the National Trust and its portfolio of properties and sites before. This commission for Bourne Mill and the wider Colchester district will provide a unique opportunity for an artist or artists to explore key themes, engaging local communities and visitors and creating some challenging new work.

About Bourne Mill and Bourne Valley

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/essex-bedfordshire-hertfordshire/bourne-mill>

Bourne Mill (Grade I Listed) stands at the eastern end of a body of water (Bourne Pond) once used as a fish pond by the monks of Colchester's St. John's Abbey. It is accessed off Bourne Road and provides a striking visual impact in what is otherwise a suburban area of Colchester and lies within Bourne Valley, a woodland and wetland site covering 15 acres sandwiched between the residential areas of Mersea Road and Old Heath Road. A minor tributary to the River Colne, Bourne Brook, runs through the valley connecting three large ponds.

The first possible reference to Bourne Mill is in the 1096 charter of St. John's Abbey Colchester, which records the donation of two fish-ponds and a corn mill by William the Conqueror's steward, Eudo Dapifer. Eudo Dapifer was the steward to the first three Norman Kings of England who held land in several countries including in Essex. He is also credited for the building of Colchester Castle (started around 1076).

The mill and its ponds are well recorded from the twelfth century onwards owing to the rich documentary history of St John's Abbey, and the fact that they were important economic assets. After the dissolution in 1538 the site remained with the Crown, and in 1544 it was granted to the first in a series of professional millers. Evidence shows that the well-stocked fish ponds were a primary purpose of the site well into the 19th century, and profit made from the fish may at times have outweighed the income from the mill.

In 1590 the mill, ponds, fish and small parcels of land were sold to Sir Thomas Lucas. Sir Thomas immediately commenced a programme of building works, which resulted in the construction of the current building using materials reclaimed from St. John's Abbey, some of it Roman (Roman materials had been used in the construction of the Abbey). The function of the building erected by Lucas has long been a source of debate. One interpretation is that it was erected solely as a fishing lodge and banqueting house and only later converted into a water mill. An alternative interpretation is that it was a fishing lodge or banqueting house which housed a water mill on the lower floor from the outset.

The question of whether the water mill was for corn milling or fulling from 1591 onwards is as yet unsolved. The milling of corn (usually wheat or barley) is quite different from the fulling process. Fulling involves treating woollen cloth with urine which causes it to heat up, after which it was put into water-powered fulling stocks to be rubbed and beaten to create a thicker cloth. The equipment required for the fulling process could have been accommodated in the lower floor of the building without impinging on the recreational use of the upper floor. It would probably have been more difficult for corn milling machinery to operate without compromising the upper floors.

It is likely that the building was in use as a fulling mill during the 17th century, and was certainly used for this purpose during the 18th century. The mill becomes a corn mill around 1830 and was operated in conjunction with Cannock Mill by a succession of millers. The conversion from fulling to corn mill required structural changes, including the replacement of a window on the east side with a loading door and the construction of a lucum (overhanging trap door outside the top of a corn mill through which bags of corn were hoisted prior to being fed down to the mill-stones – this is still in place).

The 19th century machinery was still in good condition when the National Trust acquired the property in 1936. From 1951 the mill was tenanted with uses ranging from a private house, to a base for Junior Naturalists' Club, and it was also used as an artist studio. The cottage adjacent to Bourne Mill has been there since at least 1777. It is Grade II listed and was badly damaged in Colchester's 1884 earthquake, so the current building is probably a complete re-building.

Bourne Mill is a significant example of a conspicuous display of wealth by a member of the Elizabethan gentry. The construction of a banqueting house or fishing lodge in a fashionable architectural style, and the deliberate incorporation of the family's coat of arms, were intended as status symbols. The form of the building provides significant evidence for the influence of Dutch craftsmen in Colchester.

In the 16th century a large Dutch refugee community had been established in Colchester, and in 1571 they were given exclusive rights to administer the trade in 'bays' (baize, a lighter woollen cloth). It is likely that Lucas's new building at Bourne Mill was not only influenced by and constructed by the Dutch community, but also had other associations with their pivotal role in the cloth industry. Bourne Mill is a significant remnant of Colchester's industrial past, being one of a series of mills powered by the stream (Bourne Brook) and in close proximity to Colchester's historic port (The Hythe) and historic road systems. The presence of the stream enabled this industrial use to be established.

When Bourne Mill was constructed in 1591 the mill would have been set in an open landscape, and would have been visible from a considerable distance. Significant urban development occurred from 1923 onwards, and post-War the integrity of the mill site was under threat as it became marooned within Colchester's suburbs. Since the pandemic, Bourne Mill has become part of the National Trust's Small Properties Pilot Project, exploring quality of experience rather than visitor quantity. For Bourne Mill, we see a sustainable future, rooted in and engaging with the community.

The combination of the working mill and attractive wildlife habitats makes the property particularly popular with families. The mill is gradually being used for a wider range of activities by a wider range of people and local groups. It is hoped that this commission opportunity, in partnership with ECDP, will support even greater local and regional interest in the future.

Colchester Borough Council, working with local people, has regularly maintained Bourne Valley to ensure the area is accessible for visitors, including entrance and information points, paths, steps, boardwalks, bridges, woodland and pond management, guided walks, clean-ups and litter picking. There is an Audio Trail available from the Council's website:

<https://www.colchester.gov.uk/info/cbc-article/?catid=country-parks-and-local-nature-reserves&id=KA-01621>

Bourne Mill 2023 opening dates

These cover our member offer with Guided experience tours. Other dates for on-site activity can be organised with the property team. However, to reach new audiences, you may decide to work off-site, and in which case, you will need to budget for this.

July – Sat, 22 and 29, 11-3.30pm

August – Sat, 5, 12, 19 and 26, 11-3.30pm

September – Sat, 10, 11-4pm (Heritage Open Day)

Budget and Promotion

The budget for the commission is £15,000 (including VAT). This will be treated as a grant. This is inclusive of all expenses and must therefore cover fees, travel, and materials.

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, Facebook and Instagram). ECDP and its partners hopes that the commission will attract significant numbers from the local community both in terms of active engagement and audience, and would expect to see a substantial presence of the project online.

It is not expected that the artist(s) should budget for hiring any space within or on the spaces around Bourne Mill as this will be provided as part of the support from the National Trust. Should exhibitions, workshops, activities or performances be planned this will require active engagement with National Trust staff to organise and ensure these fit in with existing programmes.

Tracking Outcomes

It is important for ECDP as an Arts Council England funded National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) to report on all of our activities effectively and accurately. The commissioning of artist(s) is a 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. The appointed artist(s) is expected to provide a final report at the end of the commission to record both quantitative and qualitative information to support ECDP in capturing outcomes. These include:

- Description of what took place and numbers of workshops/events/meetings
- numbers of participants, volunteers, audiences who attended events and digital audiences
- Reflections on how the commission has impacted on the practice of the appointed artist(s), and how the commission may have impacted beneficiaries
- Any recorded feedback from participants/beneficiaries or partner organisations involved
- Photos from workshops, events and the artwork/performances

It is expected that the commissioned artist(s) will meet with commissioners regularly throughout the project, to update on progress and talk through any issues or challenges.

Environmental Sustainability

ECDP and the National Trust are committed to minimising the potential for negative impacts on the environment. ECDP as an NPO has a leadership role in the arts/cultural sectors and can therefore 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 Bourne Mill 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. We accept that this can be challenging for less central locations.

If you would like to talk this brief through or need further information about the commission, we'd be very happy to offer support and answer your questions. Please email Jo Nancarrow on jo@essexcdp.com to arrange a meeting.