

Creative Commission 2025 Call for Proposals: The Changing Faces of Diss

Commission Budget: £10,000

Deadline: 31 January 2025

Interviews: Thursday 15 February 2025

Project Timelines: Mid/late February-August 2025

Essex Cultural Diversity Project has teamed up with Diss Corn Hall, No 8 Market Place and DesignerMakers21 in Norfolk, to invite proposals for a creative project that celebrates community, diversity and identity by charting the 'Changing Faces of Diss'.

The historic market town of Diss is located on the border of Norfolk and Suffolk, at the gateway to the Waveney Valley. Steeped in history and highlighted in John Betjeman's 1960s film about Fair Green, it has witnessed rich social and cultural change over the past six decades. We are seeking an artist to help us explore and creatively articulate these transformations, capturing the evolution of Diss from Betjeman's era to the present day, especially in the context of Diss' current aspiration of becoming a Town of Sanctuary.

On the face of it, Diss appears to be a place that has changed little over the years. With the generous welcome the town has given to migrants in recent times, celebrating cultural diversity has rightly become an important goal. However, as a society we are constantly evolving and becoming more diverse, and we also want to celebrate those less obvious and more gradual changes among the local community.

The John Betjeman film is a visual and oral reflection on Diss in 1964; a snapshot in time that provides an effective starting point for this project. The opening sequence of his trip from the station to Victoria Road is a surprise and a journey of discovery. Through exploration, he learns how the town saw itself through postcards, buildings, people, and publications, and left a record of his journey for us to re-visit some sixty years later.

We are keen to use the Betjeman film as a starting point, to celebrate changes in Diss in the intervening years through the legacy of people who have lived and settled in the locality from that time. We are also interested in changes in attitudes and perceptions; architecture and the repurposing of public and private buildings; food production and community sustenance, all of which are intrinsic in the story of Diss, its people and its landscape.

Overall, this project will help us capture the voices of people who have made Diss their home, from those who have come here for transient reasons; those who have relocated and chosen Diss as their new home; to those from the many generations who have settled in the area over the years. The project should aim to uplift and provide a platform for these many different voices, especially the more marginalised communities whose voices may not often be heard.

As a project spanning several partners and physical spaces which are within walking distance, we invite the commissioned artist to also consider how they may link up the participating venues in Diss, thematically, historically and physically. The changing uses of the Cornhall, No 8 Market Place, and No 21 St Nicholas Street in themselves tell stories that reflect change, renewal, rejuvenation and the reclaiming of public spaces. None of the buildings house their original use, but all make major contributions to supporting a diverse culture in Diss, and all should be represented within the proposal.

We welcome interest from creative practitioners from every background, working independently or part of a collective, particularly those who have a socially engaged and participatory practice. The format and content of the final piece would be shaped by the creative practitioner, their proposed project and practice, as well as the communities they work alongside. However, we would expect to see ideas of the final piece in the proposal, such as an exhibition or culmination event to bring communities, participants and audiences together to celebrate at the end of the project.

About Us

Essex Cultural Diversity Project energises cultural diversity in arts and heritage across the East of England. Our mission is to create opportunities, stimulate participation and provide a focal point for the development, celebration and co-ordination of diversity through creative activity. We achieve this through an exciting programme of projects, festivals and events; commissions to explore community, diversity and place; and training and networking events. Essex Cultural Diversity Project is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. <https://essexcdp.com>

CORN THE HALL

Diss Corn Hall is an impressive Grade II listed building which was originally built as a corn exchange. It is now a thriving arts venue offering a wide range of quality entertainment, art exhibitions and a developing outreach programme for the people of Diss and the surrounding areas. The Corn Hall also provides free to access activity such as 'Time With Friends', a cafe run by volunteers for people living with dementia. The Corn Hall's popularity with audiences from across the region has resulted in it being shortlisted in the Norfolk Arts Awards People's Choice Best Venue. The Corn Hall is run by the Diss Corn Hall Trust which is a charity dedicated to the promotion of the performing arts.

<https://www.thecornhall.co.uk>

No.8 MARKETPLACE

Operated by Diss Heritage Trust, **No 8. Marketplace's** objective is to build local heritage, developing arts in the town for the betterment of all. It is run by a group of local volunteers who have come together and reclaimed the empty former Beales store over the market place in the heart of town. A main focus of No.8 Marketplace is to provide local craft makers and artists with physical retail space where they can engage with their communities. No.8 has Take 5 café and a renovated 200 year-old ballroom that is used for live music, DJ club nights, craft markets, film performances and dance classes and it is also an arts performance rehearsal space. No.8 is working locally to develop a Diss visitor marketing campaign called 'Diss Is Our Story' to further enable visitors to come to the town to enjoy the creative richness provided by Diss Corn Hall, Designer Makers 21 and No.8 Marketplace and the amazing heritage and stories of our town. <https://no8marketplace.co.uk>

dm 21

designermakers21 is perched at the top of the Heritage Triangle, on St Nicholas Street, opposite the Corn Hall. Over the last ten years it has become known for its unique mix of excellent craft, educational interest and warm and welcoming atmosphere. There are twelve artist and crafters who have their studios at No 21 and visitors are welcome every Thursday, Friday and Saturday to speak to members about their processes and to see them at work. In addition to the 12 studios, there are two galleries; a rolling, quarterly, showcase space; a large exhibition/workshop area; and facilities for those early in their creative careers as well as those more established but seeking to benefit from the atmosphere that being at dm21 fosters. This shared, creative and vibrant centre embraces traditional and contemporary craft practices with an inspiring range of textiles, print making, sculptures, mosaics, jewellery, tailoring, weaving and carpentry. Members aim to educate and involve the community in all things craft while continuing to excel in their fields of expertise, providing their visitors with an experience to remember, empowering people to 'Have a Go'. <https://designermakers21.co.uk>

Diss Town of Sanctuary is part of the national Cities of Sanctuary movement. Our aim is to provide support for refugees and asylum seekers in the area by helping them to feel part of our community. We aim to involve as many local organisations as possible in helping to provide inclusivity, solidarity and compassion for people forced to flee their homes. Currently we are arranging for residents of the Park Hotel to have access to cooking facilities so they can prepare their traditional cuisine for themselves and their families. And we are hoping to instigate more classes in English. We aim to involve as many local groups and institutions as possible, including schools, the library, allotments, art groups and faith groups.

How to Respond to this Opportunity

We accept **written**, **verbal** and **video** proposals for this commission.

To apply, please email your proposal to jo@essexcdp.com by midnight on Wednesday 31 January and include the following:

- An outline of the artistic concept and its creative starting points, intended participants and any groups you may like to work with (if known), and your community engagement process (no more than 600 words).
- How your practice and project explores or promotes diversity (no more than 200 words).
- Some info about you and your work. This could be a short biography/artist statement with examples of previous work / a PDF portfolio / a CV / links to your website and social media.
- A short, estimated and basic budget outline, showing how you would utilise the £10,000 (4-6 lines)
- A short approximate timeline for the work (4-6 lines with key milestones)
- A completed Commissioning Monitoring Form: <https://bit.ly/commission-monitoring-doc>

Video proposals should be no longer than 12 minutes in length.

Further Support & Accessibility

It is highly recommended that you visit the **ECDP Commissions Frequently Asked Questions** page at <https://essexcdp.com/commission-faqs> which has supporting information and practical advice to support you in putting a proposal together.

We are committed to making our application process accessible, and can be adaptable to your needs. We welcome proposals in various formats, such as a written, video or audio proposals, or via a recorded Zoom call.

If you would like to talk this brief through or need further information about the commission, we'd be very happy to offer a 1-2-1 to support you and answer your questions. Please email Jo on jo@essexcdp.com to arrange a meeting.

To request a text / audio / large print version of this brief, contact Jo at jo@essexcdp.com

Useful Links

- Commission call out: <https://essexcdp.com/commission/diss/>
- About Essex Cultural Diversity Project: <https://essexcdp.com/>
- ECDP Commissions: <https://essexcdp.com/commissions/>
- ECDP Commission FAQs: <https://essexcdp.com/commission-faqs/>

- Diss Corn Hall: <https://www.thecornhall.co.uk>
- No 8 Market Place: <https://no8marketplace.co.uk>
- designermakers21: <https://designermakers21.co.uk>

- John Betjeman: Something About Diss (Norfolk) Part 1
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqy3BP6-ysk>
- John Betjeman: Something About Diss (Norfolk) Part 2
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8Dmh9wTxjM>