



Annual Report 2020/21: We Are Where We Are*

1. What we've been doing

Since canopy became a constituted group, in June 2019, we have been working to find what the cultural sector needs and what canopy should be doing. We have been testing things out, exploring potential partnerships and meeting artists and relevant organisations that we could work with in the future. That includes local authorities; arts organisations; land management bodies; local groups relating to tourism and economic development; schools and Arts Council England.

ACE's Let's Create strategy for 2020-2030 sets out what they hope to achieve. We looked at that carefully when making decisions going forward. What we hadn't planned, going forward, was a pandemic that would halt us in our tracks.

We are small and determined. We had some great projects in the pipeline that attracted media attention and funding until Covid19 called us to a halt.

2. Summarising

Canopy, constituted as a Community Group in June 2019, having first launched in 2014. Following a very well attended showcase event at West Dean Parish Council in 2017 and, on the back of that success, a grant from ACE was secured to put someone in post as a project manager. It took a year before the post started late 2018.

Our team is a small one, all but one are volunteers, who have given a huge amount of time to support the PM to run canopy. The core team at the beginning was:

Officers: Rob Olins (Chair/artist); Dave Kent (WDPC/treasurer); Nichola Goff (secretary/artist)

Steering committee: Sally Gibson (NPO/Cinderford ArtSpace); Ed O'Driscoll (AirInG); Roger Drury(Oh Crumbs/First Wednesday); Jenny Cashmore (artist); Sara Rickard(artist)

PM: Carolyn Black took on the role of Project Manager in February 2019.

We had to wave goodbye to Ed O'Driscoll and Dave Kent and wish to thank them for their commitment.

We welcome new committee members Mel Scaffold and Rod Maclachlan to the team (though we still need a treasurer to cover Dave's role). We warmly welcome interest from others to join us.

*The report title "We Are Where We Are" relates to a work by Jeremy Deller called "We're Here Because We're Here", an artwork in the form of an event, devised by Jeremy Deller, that occurred across the United Kingdom on 1 July 2016, the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, which it commemorated.

3. Planning

Much of the first year was us exploring what we needed to do. We had a lot of conversations, between the team and with others.

- Thinking about purpose - meetings internal/external, Let's Create Strategy, other models
- Talking with each other, coffee conversations, walking, network day
- Talking to parish and district councils, delivering a presentation making an economic case for the arts
- Listening - to artists, other arts groups, tourism, FEP (Forest Economic Partnership), Lydney Harbour, BLM, local authorities

We commissioned ErArts to monitor our progress and growth and they did a good job of highlighting the strengths and weaknesses. Their report informed a committee workshop day, from which the following aims and objectives were formed providing a guiding principle for canopy.

VISION

The Canopy Creative Network actively forges pathways for social change through the arts, by supporting a thriving calendar of cultural activities across The Forest of Dean

MISSION

Canopy seeks to embed the arts into society on every level by developing networks between creatives, communities and businesses. Taking an aerial view, canopy scopes, advocating and engineering connections to ensure a thriving cultural ecology. We support artists, audiences and participants to engage in the arts in countless ways. Expect to experience innovative, surprising, exciting and high-quality arts, unique to this very particular place - The Forest of Dean.

AIMS to:

- celebrate the unique qualities of Forest people and places through the creative practices
- be economically and environmentally sustainable in all we do
- develop a strong, accessible cultural community in the Forest of Dean
- support and profile contemporary arts in the area

OBJECTIVES:

- enabling the development of meaningful, accessible, high-quality creative engagement for, and with, local communities
- establishing pathways for communication and co-creation
- connecting artists from a wide range of disciplines with communities and businesses
- unlocking the creative potential of all those that we engage with
- developing effective partnerships to strengthen the arts sector
- supporting artists by providing professional development to help them thrive

4. Commissioning artists

*The report title "We Are Where We Are" relates to a work by Jeremy Deller called "We're Here Because We're Here", an artwork in the form of an event, devised by Jeremy Deller, that occurred across the United Kingdom on 1 July 2016, the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, which it commemorated.

For canopy, the saddest thing about the pandemic is not being able to deliver the Phone Box Project. With sites distributed along a ten-mile route through the forest, we planned to hold a weekend event and present a range of activities and artworks at each booth along the trail and a public event to involve everyone that had been involved as well as the public.

When the opportunity had arisen for canopy to gain access to a number of empty phone booths owned by West Dean Parish Council we created a plan to deliver a big outdoor event along a trail of phone boxes. They created a route connecting Oldcroft to Christchurch, in a wiggly line moving through the Forest. WDPC gave us a grant to kickstart the research and the artists were appointed through an open call. They began their research later 2019 with a view to presenting artworks in a range of materials/process over a weekend in mid-May 2020. They received a further sum to enable them to keep working until we secured funding to deliver the weekend event. We were on track for doing so and had two funding applications in waiting for assessment when Covid19 hit us in March 2020.

We hoped to be able to pick up where we left off, but it soon became clear that is not possible. After nearly a year holding off, we finally asked them to complete their contracts by sharing some of their research. That is now live on our website.

During the pandemic we secured emergency funding to try and keep the network going and appointed Rod MacLachlan to head up on engagement projects. We tried zoom gatherings and Facebook activity. We made micro-bursaries and commissions available (see website) which enabled several artists to make new works. But meeting up was still nigh on impossible.

Network communications became reduced to Facebook interactions and newsletters. The team met more or less monthly and discussed how to go forward. The PM contract officially ran out in November 2020. It was becoming clear, that within the sector, established organisations with ongoing costs were, understandably, a priority for funders.

5. Fundraising & Financial summary

SIMPLE OUTLINE

6. Pausing & Recovering

In the light of the difficulty to secure funding, and for the network to meet up, we have unanimously agreed to take a break and hit pause for 6 months. This doesn't mean we will stop working on canopy entirely. We shall continue to talk to each other informally, and with potential partners and committee members. As the lockdown eases, we hope we will be able to engage more easily with communities and begin to look into what role we can take in the light of the impact of the pandemic.

We invite you to contact us too – we want to hear your thoughts and ideas and how we can support each other. As the title of this report says – We Are Where We Are*. We plan to dust ourselves down and come back fighting in September 2020.

*The report title "We Are Where We Are" relates to a work by Jeremy Deller called "We're Here Because We're Here", an artwork in the form of an event, devised by Jeremy Deller, that occurred across the United Kingdom on 1 July 2016, the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, which it commemorated.

7. Thanking

We've had so many great conversations with people in the past year or so, there are too many to mention here. But to everyone, whether you are an individual or represent an organisation, if you have read this far, a big thank you for doing so, we look forward to continuing conversations.

*The report title "We Are Where We Are" relates to a work by Jeremy Deller called "We're Here Because We're Here", an artwork in the form of an event, devised by Jeremy Deller, that occurred across the United Kingdom on 1 July 2016, the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, which it commemorated.