

Shaftesbury Common Places – a Public Art Project and Much More

Background

Common Places is a public art project devised by the Dorset Design and Heritage Forum (DDHF), run in conjunction with local partners, Shaftesbury Civic Society. Initial funding of £5000 was secured through DDHF in order to commission artists who would research and design work for the town to the brief written by the commissioning partners.

Following a formal selection process a team comprising architect Adam Zombory-Moldovan and furniture designer-maker Simon Thomas Pirie has been chosen to develop proposals for the town. Both of them have strong links with the area, Adam whose architectural practice, ZMMA, is based in London, lives just outside Shaftesbury and is opening a second office in the town. Simon's furniture design studio and workshop, based between Blandford and Dorchester is long established and renowned in its own right.

The project's main focus is 'The Commons' and its new extended pavement area completed during the recent Town Centre Enhancement Scheme. Adam and Simon have created plans to make this area a focal point and meeting place, providing seating, together with an adaptable performance, display and selling space.

This art project will create something that will become a useful and beautiful addition to the townscape for residents, visitors and traders, not least during events like Carnival Week, Gold Hill Fair and May Day.

The Way Forward

The artists have now finished the research element and have presented their initial design ideas to a public meeting in Shaftesbury in February as well as to members of Shaftesbury Town Council during April. Adam and Simon's proposals show a real sensitivity and deep understanding of the town; to its history, development, geology, geography, its palette of materials and of course its people. Common Places is also a bold statement of pride and confidence in the future of Shaftesbury.

ZMMA and Simon Thomas Pirie are now working with the Civic Society and other interested parties to move the project on from something conceptual to reality. Our first step will be to seek funding to build an architectural scale model and prepare some street views, something the original research funding did not allow for. A further £5000 is needed for this.

An interesting development and parallel to the ideas focused on the 'Commons' is that Adam and Simon have had meetings, facilitated by Alex Murdin of Dorset Design and Heritage Forum, with Persimmon Homes, to develop public artwork on their new 750-home East of Shaftesbury development. Part of the original 'Common Places' brief was to make links between the old and new town. It looks like this element of the brief will happen before any work commencing in the town centre and is funded directly by Persimmon. Working across the town in this way will create a cohesive and linked strategy for public art for Shaftesbury.

The Proposals

These are some of the visual ideas developed by Adam Zombory-Moldovan and Simon Thomas Pirie that focus on the new tongue of pavement at the top of the Commons. It should be noted that these images normally form part of a much more in depth presentation supported with images which highlight the design and research themes of:

- Topography / maps / plans / cross sections
- Geology / erosion / geography / green sand seam
- Ownership / common land / enclosure / division
- Markets and trade / social feasts / street parties / local and community events
- Shaftesbury's history both ancient and modern / archaeology / peeling back the layers / what's below the surface (from fibre optic cables to a medieval roof tile)
- Prominence as hill town / glimpses of landscape through gaps in buildings / the town's place in it's landscape - linking produce to market - urban to rural
- Footprints of the 'community' / leaving a mark / a digital footprint
- Old town / new town / moving east / footpaths / paving slabs / links
- Mass / weight / material / exquisite craft / beautiful objects



The top of the 'Commons' site with artwork in plan showing paving grid reflecting themes of land division and the towns historical development. The more sculptural forms are visible above ground.



A bit more detail of the paving surface showing 3 different coloured surfaces. The white would be a standard slab in a light stone / composite material, the orange / yellow would be what we call 'Shaftesbury Tales', snippets of the great stories and myths of a place - not necessarily the text book history! The green slabs are signage directors, pointing out things in town and perhaps further afield - emphasizing the towns' link to its surrounding landscape. These slabs could appear in other places around town helping to make trails and tours.



Above ground level we have a series of forms and objects that link to what's going on in that grid. The main elements are our 'twisted planks'. These are not made of wood but some kind of green sand composite material. The idea behind these is as a multi-functional form that people can sit on, use to trade from, stand upon during events, perform on or just enjoy for their elegance. At the top right of the site there is a bench - purely for sitting on in comfort, just to watch the world go by. To the left is what we call the 'pebble', a large sculpture made of slices of locally sourced timber with text on. Again, though not strictly a seat there will be places formed in the large shape to act as seating. Our aim is to create the kind of space that people want to spend time, a natural meeting place in the sun.



The twisted plank forms in more detail. Some of the surfaces may be polished with inset elements found in and around Shaftesbury, "things that lay everyday, that folks leave around". Sit on them, stand on them, dance on them, converse on them, sell from them, meet at them, or just admire them.



We have been experimenting in the workshop with twisted 3-dimensional forms, a precursor to making the architectural model of the site.



The Pebble, made of wooden slabs and big in scale. The text would reflect where each piece had come from - hopefully the estate woodlands from the surrounding landscape. As a market town produce from the countryside will have always made this journey for trade.