

Celebrating Tillydrone: A Community-led Public Art Project

This case study explores the inspiring journey of the Tillydrone Gateway Feature, an aspirational project initiated by a group of residents in the Tillydrone area of Aberdeen. With a vision to enhance their neighbourhood and create a lasting impact, the project successfully installed a high-quality, contemporary piece of public art that serves as a welcoming landmark. Situated on the south side of the Diamond Bridge, the artwork not only signals to drivers that they are entering a residential community but also promotes engagement, positive aspects of the area, and a sense of pride and aspiration.

The Tillydrone community faced challenges, including the impact of the commuter road created by the bridge. However, the bridge also opened up new walkways along the River Don, offering residents and visitors the opportunity to appreciate the area's natural beauty and scenic environment. Through the Gateway Feature, the project aimed to remind drivers to exercise caution as they navigated through a community where people live and children play. Simultaneously, it sought to encourage people to embrace the open space, explore the area on foot or by bicycle, and discover the rich history, resilient spirit, and unique natural landscape that Tillydrone has to offer.

To bring their vision to life, the community formed a volunteer Project Team and received support from ACC CLD (Community Learning and Development) and Creative Learning staff. Community engagement and consultation were integral aspects of the project, ensuring that the artwork truly reflected the views and aspirations of the community. With funding secured from the Place Based Investment Programme (£41,460), the project embarked on its development phase, involving the community in the creation of a design for installation.

Through extensive research, an artist's brief was crafted, attracting 17 applications from local, national, and international artists. A selection panel, comprising three local representatives from the Project Team, an Elected Member, and experts from Art UK and Grays School of Art, reviewed the submissions. Four artists—David Annand (Fife), Svetlana Kondakova (Edinburgh), Joseph Ingleby (Glasgow), and SMART (led by Aberdeen artist Allan Watson)—were selected to further develop their proposals and engage with the community.

Engagement events were held at various locations, including schools, a sheltered housing complex, and community facilities, reaching a total of 119 local participants. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the planned community engagement and consultation had to be adapted to online platforms, including dialogues on Facebook and an online survey that received 330 responses. After careful consideration, David Annand's Swans design emerged as the overwhelming favourite, capturing the essence of Tillydrone's heritage and the cherished presence of swans in the community.

With planning permission secured, the project moved forward with the manufacturing and installation of the selected artwork. David Annand, an experienced artist known for delivering iconic public art, brought the vision to fruition. The Tillydrone Gateway Feature now stands as a testament to community empowerment, resilience, and the transformative power of public art, contributing to the ongoing regeneration of the area and leaving a lasting legacy for generations to come. The funding of £41,460 from the Place Based Investment Programme played a vital role in supporting the development and successful completion of the project, demonstrating the program's commitment to empowering local communities and fostering vibrant public spaces.