

Final Project Report: *Setting the Scene*

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The Newspaper

1. Summary

Overview of Project Objectives and Community Goals

Setting the Scene aimed to explore how local networks can support and define the identities of small, remote communities. By co-creating a program featuring audio material, newspaper spreads, and local events, we aimed to highlight the unique qualities of Coundon and Witton Park. The goal was to create an accessible platform for collective expression and pride, to celebrate the character of these areas, and to provide a foundation for future projects that amplify community voices.

Final Outputs

The project culminated in distributing a newspaper throughout Coundon and Witton Park, containing images from community workshops, QR codes linked to audio stories, and reflections from community members. Two final events at local community centres provided space for celebration and community interaction.

Challenges and Adaptations

Throughout the project, certain adjustments were necessary to serve the communities best. Originally envisioned as a program of ongoing radio and zine creation, we shifted to focusing on the newspaper format. This allowed us to reach more people, create a meaningful focus for the work made, and share a creative record of community expression.

Key Achievements and Impact

The project achieved its goals by engaging residents of all ages in creative activities, documenting local stories, and creating a valuable record of the area's culture. The connections with community members and leaders strengthened the engagement, resulting in deep connections through participation, positive feedback, and interest in future projects.



Mapping activity in Witton Park

2. Project Background

Initial Goals

Setting the Scenes' primary goals were to encourage creative expression among residents and strengthen community connections. This project recognised a need for local arts initiatives, especially in rural and underserved areas like Coundon and Witton Park.

Project Brief and Initial Meetings

Our initial project proposal outlined the creation of a hyper-local network connecting residents through audio and print media. The plan was to engage participants directly, helping them tell their stories in their own words and images. Early meetings with local leaders and stakeholders clarified that the project would benefit from adapting to each area's

needs and interests. Our initial plans to have semi-permanent studio space in each village had to be revisited as premature. It became apparent that we were at a much earlier stage of project development regarding co-creation and catalysing the communities into creative engagement. The same decision was made regarding 'Community Radio'. We were at a stage in which work was required for the project to identify a core cohort of engaged residents and gently introduce creative audio methodology to inspire future work and experiments that could form the basis of future creative radio projects.

While social media connected some parts of the community to the community centres, there was an awareness that they weren't reaching everyone, and they were looking to the commissioned project to help them reach out to new users. This led to a series of 'Walking Engagements' That involved us publicising a start time and meeting point and then touring both areas, gathering images and audio. Through this, we could be visible, meeting people and handing out information in the form of postcards.

Target Communities: Coundon and Witton Park

Through discussions with key figures and local organisations, we gathered insights about the unique character of Coundon and Witton Park. Both communities have strong historical roots and a diverse set of voices. Sensitivity to their traditions and a focus on accessible, enjoyable, creative activities were required.



Print activity in Coundon

3. Project Timeline

The timeline was structured to ensure thoughtful planning, community engagement, and meaningful final outputs. By dividing the timeline into planning, implementation, and final phases, the project could develop partnerships, conduct creative workshops, and culminate in well-organised newspaper distribution and celebratory events. This phased approach allowed for flexibility in responding to community needs while maintaining focus on key objectives and deliverables.

- **During the planning phase, we**
 - Developed concepts and partnership-building.
 - Conducted initial outreach to community leaders and groups.
- **In the implementation phase, we**
 - Delivered creative engagement sessions to gather material. They took the form of
 - Artist walks to increase the project's visibility, gain a deeper understanding of the places, meet people, and make connections through happenstance and in a rich 'face-to-face' way.
 - We met and discussed with community leaders to check in on progress and ensure that our approach was suitable for the community.
 - Image production events included walking with cameras and print production using Cyanotype printing to overlay the text, maps, and imagery relevant to the participants and the place.
 - We held a zine-making workshop, during which participants collaborated on the layout and format of their publications, which they could take home and keep. These sessions would inform the aesthetic of the resulting newspaper publication.
 - Sound production and recording involved a range of methods. Small portable recorders were given to participants on walks, we gathered field recordings and discussion audio, and a session was delivered using samples from the material to inform and be included in the final audio productions.
 - Producing and finalising the newspaper content
 - A newspaper with 24 printed pages. Each one or two-page section was carefully edited to include a specific activity or intervention. Words and images by participants involved in each activity were combined to create an impression of the artist/participant engagement. The result is an expressive piece of work that combines input from artists and participants. Equal weight was given to all contributions through careful editing and design, leading to a publication with shared authorship.
 - Production of final audio.
 - Nine tracks were produced to complement the newspaper spreads. These tracks included local voices, records of activity and interaction, subtle effects and texture from field recordings, and expressive accompanying processed sound to drive reflection upon the accompanying images. QR codes in the Newspaper link directly to specific audio pieces.

- **Final Phase**

- 5,000 copies of the completed newspaper were distributed to homes in Coundon, Witton Park, and the surrounding areas. Many households will have more than one person living in them, so a conservative estimate would be to double this in terms of the number of people reached. This feels like a significant engagement number.
- Hosting final events at the local community centres to celebrate and showcase the project.
 - The Project concluded with two events: Witton Park Village Hall and Coundon and Leeholme Community Centre.
 - The Witton Park event involved an exhibition of the Newspapers and tables. The tables were arranged By John Raw, a local Historian and artist/craftsperson Catherine Yates. It was an intimate and friendly event, enabling us to thank contacts at Witton Park for their support.
 - The event in Coundon was livelier. Throughout the project, contact was made with a few people who had a band called 'The Side Project', and they suggested that they would like to play at this event in the hall but would also like to include their children. This was organised, and they played for 30 minutes. It was quite a 'Free' moment, with children joining in, singing and playing instruments with the band. The audience received it with goodwill.

4. Community Engagement

Engagement Strategies

Our regular presence in the area was critical to the project's success. We connected with local groups and community centres to ensure broad representation and participation. Events were held at easily accessible locations, with entry-level creative materials to make activities welcoming.

Key Partners and Groups Involved

Local partners included the Coundon Crafts Club, the Witton Park Artists Group, and the Friends of Stockton & Darlington Railway. These organisations provided insight and encouragement, helping to foster a collaborative spirit throughout the project.

Workshop Details

Coundon and Witton Park workshops focused on storytelling, audio recording, and hands-on visual art. Residents contributed their artwork, designs, and personal stories, which became the foundation of the newspaper content.

Final Events

The concluding events, held at both community centres, were well received and provided a platform for community members to see their work displayed via the Newspapers and celebrate the project's collective achievements. Attendees expressed pride and enthusiasm for future creative endeavours.



A performance at the final event

5. Creative Outputs

The Newspaper

5000 copies of the *Setting the Scene* newspaper were distributed across Coundon and Witton Park. Connecting the communities with creative practice and the idea that the places they live are a rich source of inspiration to be explored. The traditional method of distributing print, door-to-door, addresses early concerns that the community centres social media and online engagement methods had yet to connect with a range of groups and demographics in the area. The Newspaper is a visually rich call to action that allows viewers to get involved in future projects. It includes links and information on connecting and sharing information with Northern Heartlands.

The newspaper included

- Images and artwork from workshops.
- QR codes linking to community-created audio stories.
- Words and quotes from participants reflecting on their experiences.

Audio Pieces

Local voices and sounds were gathered through interviews and recordings, highlighting the community's geography, heritage and character. These were made accessible via QR codes, adding an interactive element to the newspaper.

Additional Outcomes

Other outcomes included photography, zine making and cyanotype prints that participants kept (after they were scanned for inclusion in the newspaper).



The newspapers on display

6. Reflections on Artist Collaboration

One of the most enriching aspects of Setting the Scene was the opportunity to work as a team of two artists. Bringing together different skills, approaches, and perspectives added a

feedback mechanism to the project, leading to innovation in both the process and outcomes that may not have existed if the project had been approached from a solo perspective.

- **Learning from and Supporting Each Other:** The collaboration allowed us to explore hybrid methods, blending our expertise in audio, visual media, and participatory practices. This synergy broadened the scope of engagement activities, ensuring a more diverse creative process. We were, at times, allowing participants a high degree of freedom to make choices and take creative risks. This can create a degree of uncertainty, which in turn can impact confidence. Being part of a team meant we could encourage and support each other through these moments. Sharing responsibility builds the confidence to take creative risks.
- **Catalysing Creativity:** Working as a pair provided a unique opportunity to experiment with how different artistic disciplines intersect, sparking ideas neither artist would likely have pursued alone. This is reflected in the newspaper's 'multi-art form' approach to content, which successfully captured a multifaceted portrait of the community using images, prose, and sound.
- **Role of the Commissioning Process:** Early engagement with community leaders, facilitated by Northern Heartlands, set the tone for this collaborative approach. Meetings with key stakeholders provided invaluable insights into the needs and aspirations of Coundon's residents, ensuring the project was relevant and impactful. From the outset, there was also a sense that ideas could change to meet the project's needs. The flexibility and insight of Northern Heartlands and community leaders is appreciated.

We gained a lot from the collaboration and remained organised, creative, and friendly throughout the project. We have already submitted a proposal for another joint project and are considering others.

7. Impact and Feedback

Community Reception and Participation

The community response was highly positive. Participation grew steadily over time, and final events saw mixed attendance numbers. The project successfully connected community members, fostering a sense of pride and collective identity.

Feedback

Feedback from participants was enthusiastic, with many expressing a desire for similar future projects. Quotes from residents, such as those of John Raw, emphasised local pride in the area's history and community spirit.

Key Quotes

- "Recording music, it's not really for anyone else; it's 'cause we enjoy doing it." – Shaun McManners
- "What we really want to do is get involved." – John Raw, Etherley Incline
- "It will stay with me forever. Just a chance little project/meeting which I got so much from." - Andrew Best

8. Challenges and Lessons Learned

Challenges in Project Delivery

Logistical challenges included adapting the initial project concept to suit community needs better. The shift from a zine and audio series to a comprehensive newspaper was a critical change, enabling a more inclusive reach. Connecting with participants took a lot of work. We did not want to raid the address books of the community centre leaders, as part of their need was for us to connect with groups they didn't know. So we had to take a literal boots-on-the-ground approach, being present in the villages and introducing ourselves. This led to meeting a few people who could connect us to more. We live an hour's drive from the area, and this project was not our only work. This created a challenge in terms of how often we could be present. We don't feel this impacted the project negatively, but this insight can inform future recommendations.

Lessons Learned

- Flexibility and openness to feedback were essential in making the project responsive and effective.
- Accessibility of materials and activities increased community participation and connection.
- The highest engagement numbers occurred when we offered direct 'Come and learn how to do X and take X away with you' workshops. This possibly happened because the rules of engagement for this type of activity are well understood. However, the depth of engagement was not the same as that of the other more intimate activity, which we believe set up participants to feel confident in their abilities to further participate in creative activity and to seek out others in the area to build a local creative scene.

9. Future Recommendations

Continuing Creative Engagement

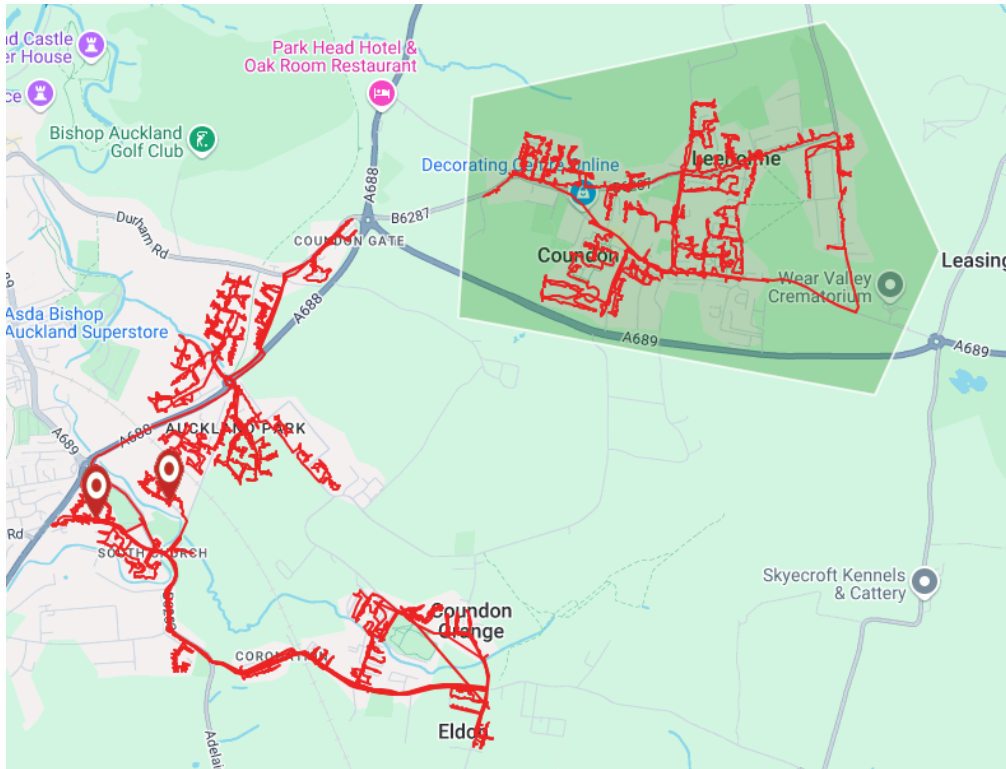
To maintain the momentum built by this project, we recommend:

- Periodic community workshops
- Engagement with and support for the 'Scene leaders' Identified through this project. i.e. Shaun and Andrew, John Raw, The Community crafts and arts groups,
- Small print runs of similar newspapers to capture new stories. With the flexible approach we took to including varied content, both in authorship and media, such a series could accommodate a range of future projects.
- Additional audio, video and photography projects could further expand on the work done, creating a more fertile environment for larger-scale future multimedia engagements.
- One of the project challenges was the need to connect Witton Park and Coundon. We understand the circumstances that led to this. However, the two places, whilst being close, had different energy levels in terms of what people wanted and their sense of place. In the future, we would recommend that the focus be on one place at a time.

Expanding the Northern Heartland Creative Directory

Building on the connections gained in this project, the *Northern Heartland Creative Directory* could include more local artists and community groups, generating greater collaboration.

A PDF of the Final Newspaper can be found [HERE](#).



GPS maps of the newspaper distribution route as it progressed.

10. Engagement statistics

Activity

Dates	Activity	Participant Numbers
07/06/2024	Coundon initiation meeting	5
18/06/2024	Witton Park visit/meet Kath	1
23/06/2024	Artist present/working Coundon	5
09/07/2024	Witton Park open engagement day	0
20/07/2024	Engagement events WP + Coundon	12
23/07/2024	Coundon craft club	12
01/08/2024	Print engagement activity	32
07/08/2024	Working in Coundon	1
08/08/2024	Witton Park artists group visit	12
09/08/2024	Activity events Witton Park + Coundon	22
15/08/2024	Witton Park print workshop	23
19/08/2024	Witton Park Friends of Stockton Darlington Railway	2
17/08/2024	Witton Park closing event	12
17/08/2024	Coundon closing event	40
	Total Active Participants	179

Engagement outputs

Delivered	To	Quantity
15 - 18/11/2024	Witton Park, Coundon, Leeholm, Escomb and surrounding areas.	5000 homes reached

Audio Stats

QR codes can present a barrier to engagement and require a degree of technical literacy. However, we have had higher listener numbers than expected in the first 5 days since the newspaper distribution:

