

Turning Empty Spaces into Creative Places

**Empty Shops Evaluation Report
For Pennine Lancashire**

May 2011



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Evaluation written by Lucy Green
Mid Pennine Arts
e: lucy@midpenninearts.org.uk
t: 01282 421986

Introduction

Creativity Works and LET

The LET (Liberating Empty Terrain) programme was launched in April 2010 by Creativity Works, a group of Pennine Lancashire Arts Development Officers who are working together to raise the profile of and engagement with the arts in Pennine Lancashire.

Inspired by the TO LET signs outside empty shops, Creativity Works wanted to provide opportunities for the local creative industries sector to develop, explore and celebrate their creativity and innovation. Working with project partners Creative Lancashire and Business Link, the project was delivered under three core strands:

1. **Branding** – via a joint promotional campaign
2. **Business Development** – using empty shops to promote creative industries and also providing business support and development opportunities
3. **Engagement** – town centre events, activities and installations

Four of the six districts involved were able to secure a proportion of the 'Empty Shops' funding allocation for the project, distributed by Department of Communities and Local Government to local Councils, and a match grant was successfully applied for from Arts Council Northwest. In kind support was also committed from partners Business Link and Creative Lancashire and from the Councils themselves.

With funding in place the project then ran for a year across the Pennine Lancashire authorities of Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Ribble Valley, with different levels of activity taking part in each Borough dependent on the funding level secured from each Council. Some work also took place in Rossendale aligned to the Open Shop project, which was linked in to LET in the other districts.

LET used town centre spaces to showcase the work of creative industries from across the Pennine Lancashire region. The spaces were a mix of outdoor spaces and empty shops. The project aimed to bring artists' work direct to the public to enjoy, in places they may not usually expect to see such activity. Collectively the project aimed to raise the region's cultural ambition, a key objective of the Creativity Works executive.

Project partners and funders were:

- Pennine Lancashire Local Authorities: Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Ribble Valley.
- Business Link North West, Creative Lancashire and Lancashire County Arts Development Unit & Arts Council England Northwest.

Research aims and objectives

Creativity Works commissioned Mid Pennine Arts to undertake an evaluation of the project that could feed into creating a model of best practice, by establishing:

- what was successful
- what difficulties were faced
- what strengths emerged
- what could be improved upon in the future

We did this by evaluating the visitor and participant experience, measuring the project reach and impact, and establishing the local area impact of LET.

We also looked at establishing if the partnership aim had been achieved, which was to disseminate learning across the districts to share learning and problem solving experiences.

Methodology

We employed the following data collection methods:

Creative Business monitoring forms

We asked businesses utilising the empty shop opportunities to monitor the number of visitors their project had, the financial value of any work sold and estimate impact on the business in the future.

Data from Business Support Partners

Business Link and Creative Lancashire monitored the number of people they engaged with and the value of the support given and provided us with this information.

Community engagement activity evaluation

This included site visits to each area, carrying out voxpop interviews with visitors and workshop attendees at selected events, in-depth interviews with artists, shoppers, and business owners and online research looking at blog comments and feedback.

An events and activity form was also used to monitor the number of people attending and participating in events which was completed by Local Authority Arts Officers in each district.

Partnership evaluation workshop

This was held towards the end of the project and brought all the partners together to evaluate their experience of the project and partnership working together, giving an opportunity to reflect and learn upon the experience through a facilitated workshop.

1. At a Glance...

LET Programme Summary

Artists taking part:
255

Artist days commissioned:
228.5



Doorstep Collective, Blackburn
Photo from CW Flickr site



ArtYarn, Accrington
Copyright Huckleberry Films

New pieces of work created by professional artists: **84**



JoJa Designs, Burnley
Photo from CW Flickr site



Play Me, I'm Yours Launch
Photo from CW Flickr site

'I've come with my two nephews. They just play on the xbox at home normally. I liked it, it was good. I haven't done anything like this in ages.'

Pendle 'Let's do Stuff!' visitor

'Great to see something positive and inspiring happening in Blackburn.'

Blackburn 'Buzzz' visitor

'I've loved working with other artists.'

Burnley artist

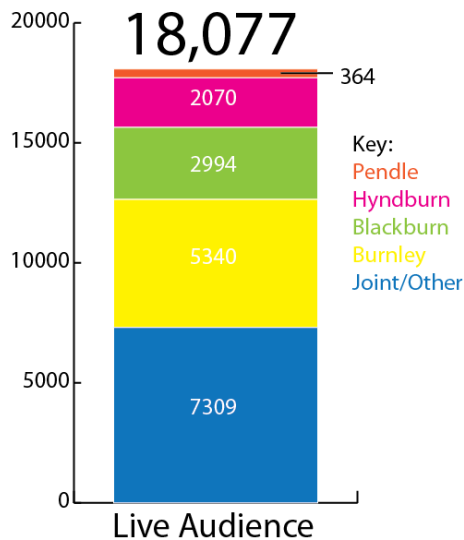
'It lifted the market: it made people want to come.'

Hyndburn visitor and shopper

266 Workshop Sessions x average attendance of 21 per session

= 5621 Taking Part

Website & Blog hits: 28k across 12 different sites



Days open to the public: **248**

| Investment | Cost per... |
|-----------------|------------------|
| ACE: £80k | Participant: £35 |
| DCLG: £62k | Artwork : £244 |
| In Kind: £58k | Audience: £11 |
| Total: £200k | Day open: £806 |
| Value of Sales: | £1532 |



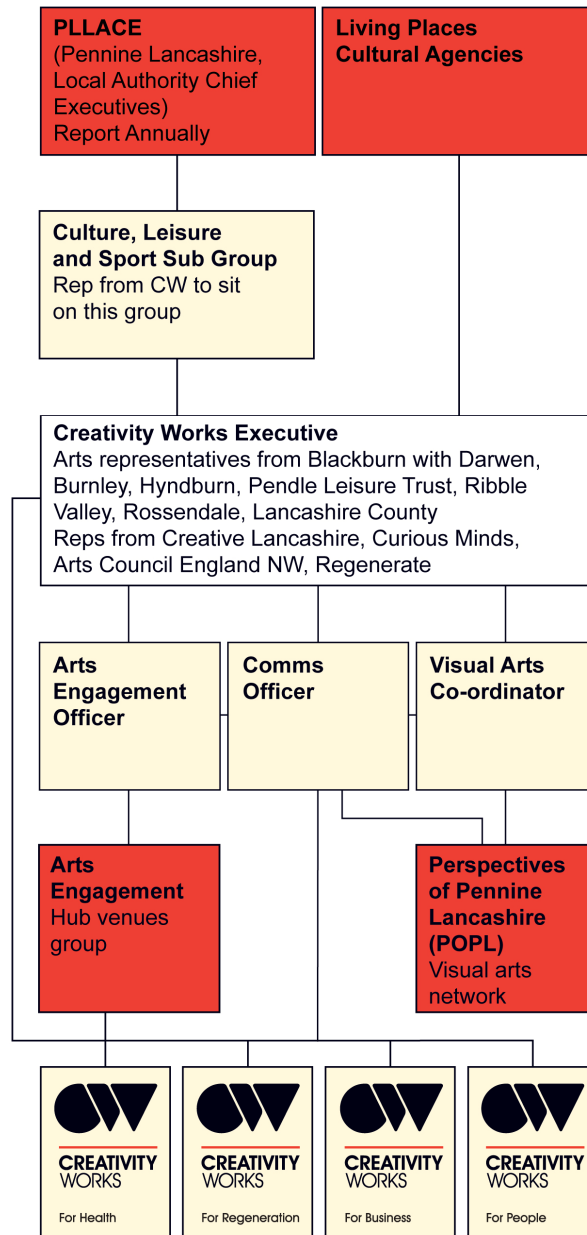
2. The LET programme

Project Structure

The project was initiated by Creativity Works, and Business Link were also brought on board as a delivery partner to further support the business development objectives of the project alongside Creative Lancashire (who were already part of Creativity Works).

The Creativity Works structure is outlined below. The group is currently not a formal body, but does adhere to a terms of agreement that was signed by all districts.

Creativity Works Structure



The LET project fell under the Creativity Works for Business group's area of work.

Project Funding

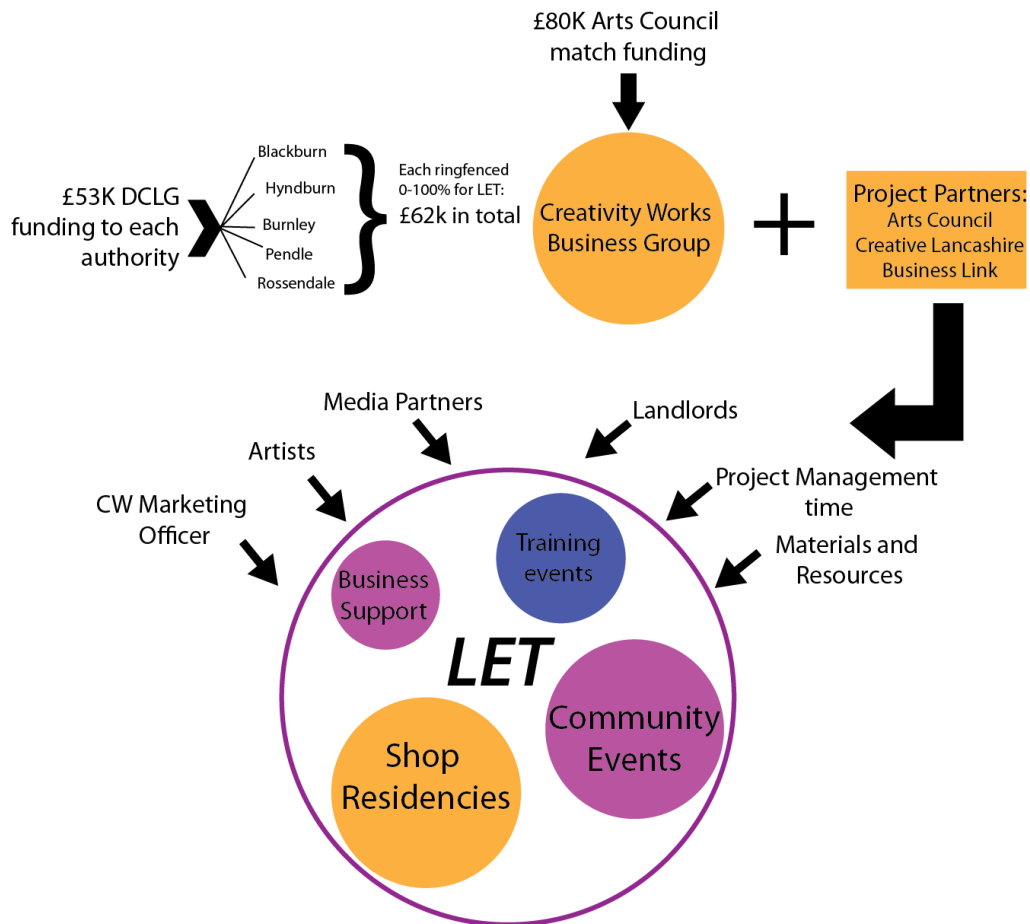
Alongside the match funding that Creativity Works were successful in obtaining from the Arts Council, the following funding and in-kind support was also provided for the programme:

- Business Link contributed £25,000 through business development meetings with creative industries involved with LET Project
- Creative Lancashire contributed £10,000 through seminars/workshops for creative industries involved with LET
- Individual districts contributed £61,788 DCLG match and
- £3000 from the Chamber of commerce and
- £7,500 (very conservative costing) in kind costings to deliver projects in districts
- Lancashire County Council contributed £5,000 project funding and Creativity Works provided staff posts and joint project working equating to £7,500.

LET Programme Ecology

The diagram below illustrates the entire ecology of the project, showing how other partners and funders fit with the partnership leading and delivering LET:

LET Programme Ecology



Programme Delivery

Activity was delivered in a variety of ways. Some activity was across all the districts involved, other work was designed and delivered specifically by a district for delivery in their area, and other elements took place in partnership between two or more of the partners.

Programme-wide activity

Branding and Communications was delivered across all strands of the project through a brand identity. The look and implementation of this was coordinated by the Creativity Works Marketing Officer.

A range of materials were produced which communicated the brand. These included the website: <http://www.creativityworks.info/let> and a project blog: <http://letproject.wordpress.com>, which all partners were able to update. Shop dressing which included shop signage, large LET promotional cubes and A boards was provided to assist each residency, and printed postcards and booklets were produced to market the project and raise awareness of exhibitions, events and workshops.

Business Development was offered through **Business Link Diagnostic Sessions** to any creative businesses that had applied to be part of the programme. In addition **Creative Lancashire Training Sessions** were open to any creative business, but bookings were prioritised for LET project participants.

Partnership Activity

The Open Shop Project

The Open Shop Project was a partnership project between heritage venues and artists in Pennine Lancashire. Managed by Creativity Works and aligned to the LET programme, it provided an exciting opportunity for artists to engage with new audiences by developing innovative work based around the eclectic collections housed in Pennine Lancashire's heritage venues, showcasing them in town centres.

Play Me, I'm Yours

Touring internationally since 2008 "Play Me, I'm yours" is an artwork by artist Luke Jerram. During 'Play Me, I'm Yours' street pianos decorated by artists were distributed across Burnley and Blackburn and Darwen.

Located in public parks, streets and squares, the pianos were for any member of the public to play.

Photo: 'Play Me I'm Yours' launch in Burnley



Portable Pixel Playground

A bit like an adventure playground, a bit like a work of art, and a bit like a computer game, the playground is a touring project from Folly and has been designed to allow young people to use everyday technologies in fun and creative ways, providing them with new, interactive and hands-on experiences of art and technology.

District Activity

The district-specific projects were carried out in different ways in each area:

Burnley – an open call for artists to take up shop residencies was advertised, alongside a managed programme of events devised by arts officers which included a **Bandstand Marathon**, a **College catwalk fashion show** and a **Science Busking** event.

Blackburn – curated a series of commissions including a **street mural**, **shop residencies** and **shop-based performances**.

Hyndburn – took a phased approach, with each commission informed by the previous activity, including a **research project**, **mapping**, **community engagement** and **celebratory** events.

Pendle – had a smaller budget so concentrated their programme on a shorter intense period of activity with a week-long series of shop based **workshops** commissioned by Council officers and then managed by a lead artist.

Ribble Valley & Rossendale – took part on a smaller scale by being involved in the Open Shop project, which was aligned to the LET programme.

Overview of activity

| Business Development | Blackburn | Burnley | Pendle | Hyndburn | Ribble Valley | Rossendale |
|------------------------------|-----------|---------|--------|----------|---------------|------------|
| Business Link Diagnostics | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Creative Lancashire Training | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| LET shop residencies | √ | √ | √ | √ | | |
| Open Shop Project | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |

| Community Engagement | Blackburn | Burnley | Pendle | Hyndburn | Ribble Valley | Rossendale |
|------------------------------|-----------|---------|--------|----------|---------------|------------|
| LET shop workshops | √ | √ | √ | | | |
| LET shop performances | √ | √ | | | | |
| LET Market workshops | | | | √ | | |
| Street Murals | √ | | | | | |
| Bandstand Marathon | | √ | | | | |
| College catwalk fashion show | | √ | | | | |
| Science Busking | | √ | | | | |
| Portable Pixel Playground | √ | √ | | √ | | |
| Play Me, I'm Yours | √ | √ | | | | |
| Animating Accy | | | | √ | | |
| Crocheting Accy | | | | √ | | |
| Mapping Accy | | | | √ | | |
| Dance Flash Mobs | | √ | | √ | | |
| Accrington Alive Event | | | | √ | | |

3. Project Reach

The project set targets for delivery and participation figures, and these are shown in the table below alongside actual delivery figures and a column showing the difference between the target and achieved numbers:

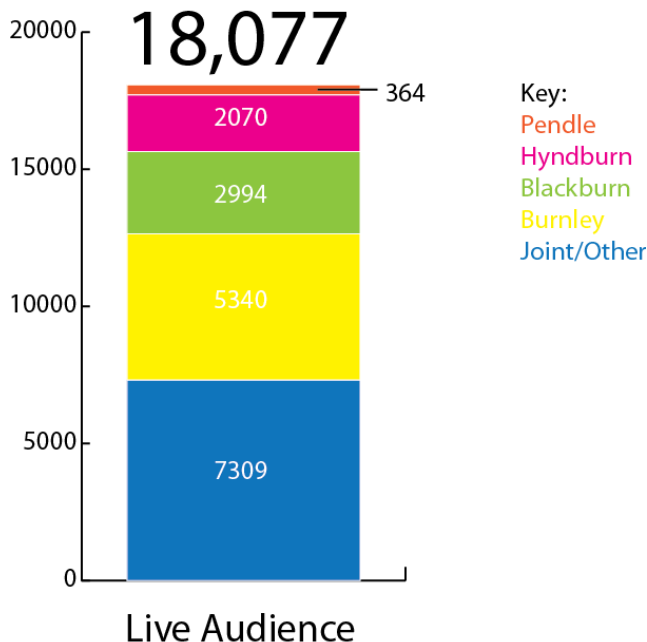
| | Target | Actual | Difference |
|------------------------|--------|--------|------------|
| Artists | 50 | 255 | +205 |
| Participants | 750 | 5,621 | +4,871 |
| Audience live | 10,000 | 18,077 | +8,077 |
| Audience online | 500 | 28,056 | +27,556 |
| Exhibition days | 164 | 248 | +84 |
| New artworks | 24 | 84 | +60 |
| Artist days | 176.5 | 228.5 | +52 |
| Sessions | 25 | 266 | +241 |

This demonstrates that the LET programme managed to well exceed its targets. The numbers who experienced the project online were far ahead of what was expected as several projects had very well used blogs, and live attendance was over 80% higher than expected across the programme. In addition a number of artist collectives were able to take up shops residencies and use them as studio space, meaning a much higher than expected number of new works were produced as a result of the programme.

Audiences

The LET project provided 248 exhibition days which were all open to the public. In total 18,077 attendances were recorded at events across the programme. The graph below shows how these were spread across the four key districts involved in the project:

Audience figures – Live



Online audiences of 28,056 were recorded, mainly through blog and website hits recorded for 12 different sites and/or specific pages set up through the project.

Public participation

The public were also able to participate in the project in many ways, through taking part in creative workshops and even performances, as in the case of the 'flash dance mobs' that happened in Burnley and Hyndburn.

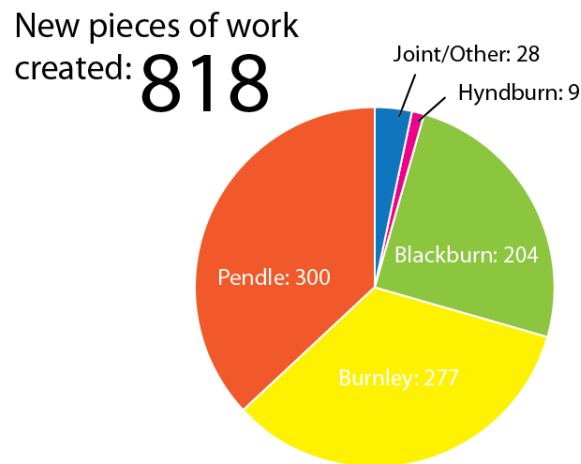
$$266 \text{ Workshop Sessions} \times \text{average attendance of } 21 \text{ per session} = 5621 \text{ Taking Part}$$

Artist involvement

255 artists were involved in the project in total, compared to the 50 that were expected to take part. Many of the artists who won commissions or shop space were collectives, so this enabled larger groups than anticipated to be involved in the project. LET provided 228.5 days of artist employment, over 50 more than the 176.5 planned for.

818 new pieces of work were created as part of the programme, 84 of which came from professional artists.

The chart below shows how these were split across the areas involved in LET:



43 of these were commissions that came direct from the Councils involved, and a further 41 were works created by professional artists using the shop residency opportunities as studio space to create new work.

127 were produced by amateur artists and a further 607 by members of the public participating through workshops and drop in sessions.

The table below illustrates the full break down of how the pieces were produced:

| | Blackburn | Pendle | Burnley | Hyndburn | Joint/Other |
|-----------------------------|-----------|--------|---------|----------|-------------|
| Professional artists | 21 | 1 | 25 | 9 | 28 |
| Amateur artists | - | - | 127 | - | - |
| Participants | 183 | 299 | 125 | - | - |

Geographical spread of activity

The table below shows how the figures break down across the four districts where the majority of activity took place.

| | Blackburn | Pendle | Burnley | Hyndburn | Joint/Other |
|------------------------|------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Artists | 25 | 11 | 79 | 89 | 51 |
| Participants | 213 | 364 | 609 | 545 | 3890 |
| Audience live | 2994 | 364 | 5340 | 2070 | 7309 |
| Audience online | 2000 | 0 | 3975 | 4321 | 17760 |
| Exhibition days | 81 | 7 | 84 | 25 | 51 |
| New artworks | 204 | 300 | 277 | 9 | 28 |
| Artist days | 32 | 29 | 7 | 86 | 74.5 |
| Sessions | 49 | 14 | 107 | 34 | 62 |

4. Impact on Creative Businesses

One of the three key elements of the project was Business Development – using empty shops to promote creative industries and also providing business support and development opportunities.

The research showed that this support impacted on the creative businesses involved in three key ways, through:

1. Skills and career development
2. Income generation and business growth
3. Identification of new audiences, networks and contacts

Skills and career development:

Sharing skills

Many activities involved artists working with others to lead events or workshops and this also gave them the opportunity to support and learn from one another, sharing skills, advice and experience, as well as being inspired creatively by each others' work.

Working with other artists became a professional development opportunity for the artists involved, as they were able to lean on one another and learn from others' experiences as teachers and workshop practitioners:

'Keith was helping me at every step, and I felt that without his thinking on the spot the workshop wouldn't have gone so smoothly. I have had very constructive conversation with Keith who advised me of how to approach the schools, and how to promote myself. I am going to use his tips when looking for future projects.'
Gosha, artist

The shop residencies were also a chance to try out and learn new skills; in curating, delivering workshops to different age groups, selling and gallery management:

'I have been able to extend my experience at curating. This an important skill for most contemporary artists and one I will be using on a more regular basis. I now understand many of the issues around running a gallery and the challenges of making it a sustainable operation. I recognise the need to develop my selling techniques and feel that Bzzz... provided me with a good testing ground to hone these skills.'
Julia Swarbrick

They also gained confidence from knowing that the public supported what they were doing:

'Knowing the public are behind us is another really good thing.'
Art Exchange

Income generation and business growth:

Value of sales

Through the shop residencies four different artists and creative businesses sold a total of £1532 worth of work.

Potential clients & future sales

Identifying potential clients for sales of artwork was also something that came out of the programme for artists involved, with the number of potential clients secured through the project were reported as 151.

'It's given me new contacts... It has provided another network of people who will possibly involve us in other things. There is already a knock on from this. Kirsty is talking about using funding to do some long-term work with Art of Distraction. Paul has a plan for some work on empty shop hoardings, and has asked us to submit something for that. It is a busy time, it's been great'
Keith, KP artists

'It provides opportunities for artists to showcase their skills to school teachers'
Artist, Nelson

Developing and trying out new business ideas

The many professional development opportunities the project has provided for the artists who have been involved has emerged as a really strong outcome. The project has provided a safe and supported space for artists to try out new ways of working and introduce work to new audiences, and shop residencies have acted as test beds for new workshop ideas:

'It's been a big learning curve for us, because you don't know how you're going to be received by the public, until you do something like this.'
Art Exchange

'On the technical side, a lot of the animation, I've never done before, so we had to devise new techniques, but it's good to push ourselves.'
Huckleberry Films

Doorstep Collective, who took up a Blackburn shop residency, said that they had learnt so much from the experience, it would impact on every way they would run projects in the future, from how to brand and market, to how to deliver activity. LET had acted as a testbed for them, and they are now using this pilot of their work as a case study for a funding application that they are developing for a larger scale project:

'We've changed every little element of what we were planning to do as a result of this. The branding, how we will communicate and work with others. It made the idea of partnerships even stronger.'
Doorstep Collective

Identification of new audiences, networks and contacts

New visitors

Alongside this the project was a great way of getting exposure to new audiences. Artists and creative businesses said that approximately 15% of the visitors they had were new visitors who hadn't seen their work before, that's 2515 new visitors that LET attracted in total.

In addition they gained a total of 84 new clients as a result of the work they were doing as part of LET.

'It's succeeded at getting people in who wouldn't have necessarily seen any artwork (before).'
Phil Bradley, Artist

Contacts and networking

Artists have told us how much they have built their networks as a result of being involved in such a high profile project, and that they have made new connections with other artists:

'The project has helped me to create a link with a wide range of local artists. There will be plenty of opportunity to work collaboratively in the future.'

Julia Swarbrick

'It's an amazing thing for artists to have communication with other artists. I don't think that anyone can work in a bubble.'

Phil Bradley, Artist

'We've done new stuff involving other people as well, so that's pushed us.'

Huckleberry Films

Many used the opportunity to identify people interested in workshops and built mailing lists through the project, with the number of potential workshop participants identified recorded as 302 from a total of seven artists involved in the project.

'Feedback on a lot of the workshops has been absolutely brilliant. It's also created a lot of networking, people like Calico Housing have popped in and said to us, are you running future workshops – we'd like this and this.'

Art Exchange

How could the experience been improved?

The key issue that artists highlighted they had faced whilst participating were:

1. Receiving more information (about the spaces being used or workshop participants) in advance.

'Pre-event information was slightly lacking as I didn't know what age, how many and what level of participant I would be working with - but I appreciated that you hadn't arranged that at the time.'

Artist, Nelson

2. Having a project manager around day-to-day to iron out any issues that arose was identified as something that would have been helpful:

'It would have been useful to have someone around on the days that we were there.'

Doorstep Collective

3. Advance visits to the space to identify any potential problems within the shop was mentioned as something that would have been useful:

'The space wasn't ready to use straight away and needed further prep – hazards like open plug sockets and problems like dirty windows.'

Doorstep Collective

5. Visitor and Participant Experience

What did visitors like?

Participants liked the unusual artwork being produced, and having an opportunity to get involved, and often get messy and hands-on, in many of the workshops that were provided in the shops and at community events:

'I've been doing the elephant. When I started it seemed a bit strange because I didn't know what it was at first. It's strange and different. At first I thought it was a giant sheep!'
Boy aged 10, Nelson

'You could make clay animals, so I did that. I made a clay rabbit. Me and my partner really enjoyed it, and all the kids who were there were really enjoying it too. I love the animation, it's a beautiful style.'
Project Participant, Accrington

They liked being able to work together, especially as a family on something, and see an end product immediately:

'They are a bit young really...so I'm not sure if they enjoyed it, but me and my daughter-in-law did! We learnt how to do it, it is just something nice to keep and something they've done with us. It's good to bring children in together to work together, it teaches them more skills, seeing an end product at the end.'
Mother and daughter in law with babies, Nelson

In Blackburn, comments left in a visitors' book show how much they enjoyed Julia Swarbrick's exhibition and liked the work on display:

'An electrical and inspiring collection. Sparks the imagination!'
Blackburn Visitor

'Very good work, fantastic and stunning.'
Blackburn Visitor

The workshops in Blackburn, as in other areas, also got a fantastic positive reaction from attendees:

'Very enjoyable workshop. Would recommend Julia's course to anyone.'
Blackburn Visitor

'Fantastic abstract painting workshop with a very helpful and experienced friendly artist!'
Blackburn Visitor

Encouraging repeat visits

Many participants who visited events or workshops during the week came back for repeat visits at the weekend, and there was anecdotal evidence of this happening in Pendle as well as in Blackburn, especially at the family friendly workshops that were run in these areas:

'It was really fun, because my mum got to try face painting my face, and we could do the elephant with chapattis. It was really good! I came the first day, my teacher told me that it was the last day today, so I wanted to come back. It was really fun!'
Girl aged 8, Nelson

Engagement and learning

Participants got the opportunity to try something new that they had never done before:

'When I saw the chapatti I went, wow! I don't usually do art that often, if there is something like this going on I will have a go at it...because it is unusual. I didn't know it would be like this, with lentils. That's the first thing I've ever done with food to make artwork. I've been sticking lentils on an elephant's bum!!'
Two boys aged 10, Nelson

'It was great, really good that our little group was involved, I really enjoyed it. It was wonderful to see it, I think the humour of Lancashire really comes through.'
Project participant, Accrington

Artists felt that the response from the public had been really positive:

'I think the engagement with people has been absolutely fabulous. I'm getting replies and e-mails, two months on I'm still being contacted by people who are sending me photographs of life in bygone days in Accrington. People have been really, really responsive and they do want to know what is going on and they want to be helpful and provide feedback.'
John Flanagan

'We've had people of all ages, and they have really engaged with it in that way, and used it to learn something for their own benefit, which is really good.'
Rachael Elwell, ArtYarn

Several artists set up weekly workshop sessions as part of their work, and the participants who attended these talked about how the groups involved developed a real sense of community. The knitting groups set up by Rachael Elwell in Accrington and Burnley were particularly successful, with the Burnley group still continuing as a legacy of the project, meeting weekly in a local café of their own accord. One participant in Accrington explained what the appeal was:

'People have missed it, now it's gone. They all got together and had a natter you know. They're usually stuck indoors, they come down here, they do the shopping, then they go back home. But they had a focal point, to sit down to. (Rachael) was very good with them, she made them all feel at home. And each one were helping each other out. Also if someone had a problem, somewhere else, somebody might say, 'I had that problem and went to such-and-such and they helped me'. Bringing the community together, and making people realise that there are people the same as them, that they might not see day to day.'
Project participant, Accrington

Bringing art into the community

Several artists commented on the difference between showing work in public or shop spaces, and a traditional gallery:

'If you were going to a gallery...you would plan your day, but when you're just walking past a shop you think can you can go in a have a browse, like you would in any other empty shop.'
Art Exchange

'When you first enter into a public space like this, people are a little a bit sceptical at first, but if you communicate well, and if people know they don't have to pay to take part and that's explained its fine. It's been really easy, and people's reactions have been really positive. I've left work hanging in the space and it's been really well respected.'
Rachael Elwell, ArtYarn

Artists liked seeing their work in community spaces, and felt that it made it more accessible for the public:

'My work is very tangible, and if you place it in a gallery, people are more reluctant to come up and to touch it...here people can walk round it and look at it. it's more accessible here.'
Rachel Elwell, ArtYarn

'I think if we'd put this in a gallery, half as many people would have come.'
Caroline, Huckleberry Films

Marketing the project

People did say that they wanted to hear and see more information about these kind of activities:

'I think it is lovely, but I don't think there is enough information, you don't always discover it until it's right now.'
Mother with son, Nelson

'I think it might need a bit more coverage as to exactly what's going on in there as it does seem hard to know exactly what is going on in the shop.'
Local shop worker, Burnley

Council involvement

Some people did make assumptions that as it was a Council project, they would be able to avoid paying rents and rates – which was certainly not the partners' experience, as identifying and securing units was one of the biggest challenges of the project. Rather than Council units, several districts worked with private landlords:

'Its council run – so the council don't have to pay themselves rates do they.'
Local shop worker, Burnley

6. Impact on the area and community

Bringing the area alive

People said time and again that they liked seeing shops used for something, rather than left empty:

'It does look bad when shops are empty. Seeing them busy is obviously better than seeing empty shops.'
Local café owner, Burnley

'People were really appreciate of a space not being left, with the shutters down – people like to see things going on and things happening.'
Rachael Elwell, ArtYarn

The artists involved were very clear that people wanted more – this highlighted the latent demand that exists for this kind of provision. Artists in Blackburn and Pendle in particular reported that visitors had said that there was nothing creative for the under 5s they knew of in the area. The artists felt that it really brought the area alive and brought people to the space:

'It really did animate it. On a Saturday it was really buzzing.'
Doorstep Collective

'I think it's had a positive effect on the area.'
Art Exchange

Much needed provision

Artists were delighted to have an outlet and town centre presence through the project:

'I was here a little while ago when some of the artists from Art Bunker came in...we've been talking about how successful it is to have an arts presence, how nice it is just having an outlet for artists.'
Phil Bradley, Artist

Several said they felt that having an opportunity like this was crucial in the local area, for example in towns like Nelson, as it was an alternative to the norm:

'He wanted to come and do something, this is lovely because kids should be able to have more opportunities. He was proud to see his work up there. It is good, being a small town, kids get bored so easily, there is not many things happening round here.'
Mother with son, Nelson

Visitors were please to see that the Council were supporting local artists through LET:

'Really great to see local artists being represented and to have a superb support system... I really hope it continues!!!'
Blackburn visitor

Many visitors, for example in Blackburn, emphasized that they would like to see a permanent space for artwork to be exhibited:

'I have really enjoyed visiting the LET space! It was great seeing some great work in a local place. It should be permanent.'
Blackburn visitor

'Why can't we have the corn exchange for an arts centre: cinema/art house films, gallery, playhouse, workshop/studio???'
Blackburn visitor

Many visitors in Blackburn commented on how inspiring it is for local artists to see others' work and have a place to show their work and share ideas:

'Very inspiring to see artists in Blackburn working and exhibiting together!'
Blackburn visitor

'Great idea, Blackburn sorely lacks space for local exhibitions. A great incentive for local artists to get inspired and be creative.'
Blackburn visitor

'Very impressive displays with a rich diversity of local talent – much needed area of creativity for the folk of Blackburn.'
Blackburn visitor

Demand for more

Visitors said that they wanted more things like this, and enjoyed being able to see creative work in the evening and in unusual spaces. There was definitely an appetite for more of the same:

'More of this please! Great to see creative art at this time of the evening.'
Blackburn visitor

'I think there should be more community projects, bringing the projects into the community rather than you having to go to some far out centre.'
Project Participant, Accrington

Visitors thought it was great for areas like Blackburn, and they felt it was an inspiring and positive initiative:

'What a brilliant open evening. Fantastic show upstairs and downstairs. Great for Blackburn.'
Blackburn visitor

'Awesome to see a creative buzz starting up in Blackburn – really great and refreshing!'
Blackburn visitor

Legacy for the shops

Many artists made the point that their presence had in most cases improved the appearance of the area with a smarter shop front and interesting display:

'Passersby enjoyed seeing something interesting in the window whether it be works of art or general activity in the shop. The redecoration of the shop improved the overall appearance and made it more appealing to onlookers, visitors and potential visitors.'
Julia Swarbrick

7. The Programme Partnership

How did the partnership work?

The partners were all involved in developing the initial project idea and contributed to shaping the application for match funding to the Arts Council. In terms of delivery one Arts Officer in each district then took responsibility for the budget and work in their specific area.

In order to successfully share learning and keep a cohesive programme, regular bi-monthly project meetings were held which all partners were invited to attend. These worked well as an opportunity to share ideas, keep partners up to date and plan and manage the collaborative cross-programme work.

What benefits did working in partnership bring?

During the partnership evaluation workshop the partners and key stakeholders had a chance to feedback on their experience of working on LET.

Overall the programme partners had a very positive experience of working on the project. They enjoyed the variety of work:

'Diverse – delivered lots. Local shops, animation, regional impact, local benefit, artist development.'

'Exciting and really positive – particularly relating to artists experiences.'

'Fun and worthwhile.'

And liked being part of something bigger than they would normally work on, involving lots of visitors and partners:

'Enjoyable project as it got lots of people involved.'

'Exciting as some great artists and events included.'

'Overall positive – I enjoyed being part of something big.'

They acknowledged that the partnership working had helped to deliver a wider programme over a longer period, and meant that a more varied programme of work could take place:

'Partnership working helped spread out the programme.'

What were the key successes?

The partners felt that the key highlights of the project for them were:

1. Successfully animating empty spaces
2. Increasing arts activity generally in the region
3. Recognising through LET the talent that exists in the area
4. Working in partnership successfully, which enabled the regional programme to compete with large cities for funding and artists

5. Good digital support – added additional element
6. Strong press for the project, in particular for *Play Me I'm Yours*, which resulted in a great media relationship and raised the profile of the whole project
7. Meeting and working with new artists
8. The variety of schools and people who attended
9. Getting positive messages from people about the areas in which they live and work
10. Seeing the general public really get involved in art through workshops and participatory events

What challenges did the partners face?

Business support: providers Business Link found it hard to work with all the artists involved as many weren't eligible for some of the business support avenues they had hoped to offer. There was also a lower take-up of support than had been hoped for.

Local delivery: the project was planned regionally but managed and delivered at a local level, meaning there was often different interpretations of the themes and strands of work agreed.

Marketing: there were lots of parts all happening at different times with different lead in times, making finding single message for communications difficult.

Politics: juggling the needs of internal Council teams and the artistic values of the project wasn't always easy.

Securing properties: empty properties with absent owners were found in most areas to be a real problem.

8. LET in four key districts

Blackburn



Photos taken from http://www.flickr.com/photos/creativity_works/page2/

LET in Blackburn

The project in Blackburn began with a Portable Pixel Playground visit and the joint *Play Me, I'm Yours* project, which took place in Burnley at the same time. In Blackburn a mural was then commissioned from Sally Leach for a hoarding on Lord Street West, and LET work continued with a series of artist residencies and performances in an empty shop unit near the Town Hall.

The residencies and performances were from:

- Doorstep Collective
- Julia Swarbrick
- Art of Distraction (Lets Get Reminiscing and Festive Arts Fayre)
- Collective Encounters
- Jane Samuels
- Action Factory
- Student project (Look At LET)

Project summary in Blackburn

| | Blackburn |
|-----------------|-----------|
| Artists | 25 |
| Participants | 213 |
| Audience live | 2994 |
| Audience online | 2000 |
| Exhibition days | 81 |
| New artworks | 204 |
| Artist days | 32 |
| Sessions | 49 |

Artist feedback

'It has provided us with an exhibition of works that we can add to and take elsewhere. We already have a promise of an exhibition in the summer.'

Art of Distraction

'We have explored different artistic forms than our normal practice.'

Art of Distraction

'I have identified opportunities for running workshops in the area and will look at how to initiate future projects. Links to Community groups, Youth service, Refugee action mean there are opportunities to be explored delivering art projects with a variety of groups.'

Julia Swarbrick

'The project raised awareness of a number of talented local artists new to exhibiting.'

Julia Swarbrick

Visitor feedback

'All work was absolutely fantastic and awe inspiring. A great number of different perceptions of Blackburn. Brilliant.'

Shop visitor

'Really great to see local artists being represented and to have a superb support system... I really hope it continues!!!'

Shop visitor

'Brilliant art work – lovely to get exhibitions in Blackburn!'

Shop visitor

'Great to see something positive and inspiring happening in Blackburn.'

Shop visitor

Learning points

- Reaction from the public was fantastic – they liked seeing local artists work and being able to view art in the evening was also a plus. Many visitors and artists involved said they would like to see a permanent space with the same remit in Blackburn.
- The shop space itself was small, so limited on occasion the number of visitors that could view performances.
- Having a local artist produce the street mural really helped when it came to engaging the public.
- As with other areas, the artists that were first to use the shop space encountered the most practical problems in getting the space fit for use, which ate into delivery time. Problems included signage not being ready and a dirty and messy shop interior. It was suggested that a walk through the space in advance of the residency with the project team and artists would have help identify potential issues early.

Burnley



Photos: Art Bunker

LET in Burnley

Burnley's LET project has brought a series of events to Burnley town centre and provided local creative industries a shop space to promote themselves in. Between May and October 2010, 14 St James street was the home of a series of creative businesses, every 4 weeks a new one created a different installation. The residencies were taken up by:

- Joja Designs
- Art Bunker
- Best Joined Up
- Art Exchange

As well as hosting Portable Pixel Playground and *Play Me, I'm Yours* (along with Blackburn) the town centre played host to a series of community engagement events, including:

Bandstand Marathon: part of the Cultural Olympiad, this was a UK wide programme which Burnley took on the challenge of - programming four bands across four bandstands in one day.

College Fashion Show: Burnley College worked with the LET Project team to put on a fashion show which (thanks to Arts & Business) was supported by John Lewis. It took place in Charter Walk, Burnley on 3 November. Young people's designs from high school right up to degree level were shown on the catwalk alongside high street fashions.

Science Busking: As part of the LET town centre animation programme, *Science Made Simple* delivered a day of Science Busking in the town centre, engaging all ages in creative learning about such things as sonic booms, visual illusions and aerodynamics.

Project summary in Burnley

| | Burnley |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Artists | 79 |
| Participants | 609 |
| Audience live | 5340 |
| Audience online | 3975 |
| Exhibition days | 84 |
| New artworks | 277 |
| Artist days | 7 |
| Sessions | 107 |

Photo from Art Exchange



Artist feedback

'We wanted to see how well the workshops were received – this has basically been a test bed for us,'
Art Exchange

'I've loved working with other artists. I wouldn't have met Cheryl, who I have upmost respect for right now, if it hadn't been for this project.'
Phil Bradley, Artist

'I champion the council for supporting the project. I see the arts as being an empowering thing - art brings money into a place.'
Phil Bradley, Artist

Visitor feedback

'People who have come in have said it's a really good use of an empty space, rather than just walking past another empty shop or a boarded up window, its something interesting to look at, and people bob in and ask what's going on.'
Art Exchange

'A lot of people have come in and discovered I can just have a go at that, I'm not frightened of it anymore. It has forged new friendships between people that have been coming in, doing classes and things like that together.'
Art Exchange

'Some opening times would have been good.'
Local shop worker and visitor

'The piano idea was quite good. It was a lot better than I expected, I thought that it would get smashed up, but quite a few played on it, and quite a few good ones as well. It did seem to bring people round, bring people to the area.'
Local shop manager

'We've seen more custom because of it. We've got a knit and natter group that come in on a Wednesday morning. That was part of one of the groups that was in there, and now they come in here. It's gone from 3, to 4, and this morning there was 8 of them.'
Local café owner

Learning points

- People are more willing to go in and browse in a shop space than a typical gallery; however they want clear and well positioned information showing opening times, who's in the shop, what's going on in there.
- Getting local shop owners on side could be better utilised as a marketing tool. Many were interested but unsure of what was going on, and spreading the word amongst these people would mean an a number of knowledgeable advocates who could pass on information to their own customers.
- Negative assumptions can abound when people know that the Council are backing a project – wrongly assuming that rates won't be paid or rent needed. Clear communication on the investment made may help.
- Generally shop visitors and locals are pleased and proud of the Council for backing such an initiative, and awareness seemed high that this is who was behind the work.

Hyndburn



Photo from <http://www.creativityworks.info/let/hyndburn-activity>

LET in Hyndburn

The LET Project in Hyndburn is taking a phased approach, with progressive development of separate projects: Mapping Accy, Crocheting Accy and Animating Accy followed by Flash Mob Accy and Accrington Alive.

For Phase 1, John Flanagan, a Blackburn based artist, researched and created a new and highly original map of the town for **Mapping Accy**.

For Phase 2, a series of artists were commissioned:

Crocheting Accy: Artyarn – Rachael Elwell, a creative knitting and crochet artist, created sculptures for placing around Accrington Market Hall. Rachael spent time in the Market working with the public to teach them crocheting skills.

Animating Accy: Huckleberry Films – Caroline and David have created an animated film featuring the voices of Accrington residents and animated characters.

In Phase 3 there was a Flash Mob Dance, co-ordinated by Cassandra Webster from **ReAct Academy**. The flash mob was held at various locations around Accrington town centre on 20th November 2010.

This was followed by a community event called **Accrington Alive**, which included buskers and street performances.

Project summary in Hyndburn

| | Hyndburn |
|-----------------|----------|
| Artists | 89 |
| Participants | 545 |
| Audience live | 2070 |
| Audience online | 4321 |
| Exhibition days | 25 |
| New artworks | 9 |
| Artist days | 86 |
| Sessions | 34 |



Artist feedback

'We hadn't done anything quite like this before. For me (the best part) has been the number of people that have been involved, young people, who's designs we've had in the film, it's given them a voice.'
Caroline, Huckleberry Films

'The nice thing about this project has been that people have come to learn crocheting skills from me, but then ladies have come to me and shown me things. They brought other crafts along, one taught me how to do tatting, a really old crafting skill, so it's been an exchange of crafts amongst the community, and with me, which has been really good.'
Rachel, ArtYarn

'We had lots of stories. The map wasn't about the roads, it was about trying to get something about the people in there as well, the history, the culture.'
John Flanagan

Visitor feedback

'It was just a bit of a laugh (at first). And then when you listened to it, you realise that everybody likes the town. It gives you a bit of encouragement.'
Animating Accy participant

'It lifted the market. It made people want to come into the market.'
Crocheting Accy participant

'I think (arts projects like this) are fantastic...it gives a bit more depth to the town centre, gives it a more cosmopolitan feel, rather than just shopping...it brings some beauty into the town.'
Shopper, Accrington

'There are certain things on there that I've never come across before that are totally new to me, which is fantastic to see.'
Event visitor, Accrington

'It's the most charming thing I've ever seen!' Market Shopper

Learning points

- Artists liked being able to work with others from different disciplines and see how their work could interact.
- People in the market liked having community events going on there, and felt they would miss it when it was gone.
- The Crocheting Accy project in particular was really well-loved by participants, with many using the group as a way of communicating with others, a space to come together, talk and share problems.
- Juggling several agendas made producing a map difficult, keeping the Council's needs in mind as well as what the public wanted to see wasn't easily achieved.
- *Animating Accy* has gone on to have over 3000 YouTube hits and is a great legacy for the project. Viewers said it lifted their spirits, made them feel more positive about Accrington and took them by surprise, as it uncovered a latent sense of pride and fondness for the area.

Pendle



LET in Pendle

The project in Pendle had a smaller budget than the rest, so concentrated their work on a focussed week-long programme called *Let's Do Stuff*. This included making a large elephant sculpture out of desiccated coconut, building and floating small rafts, as well as more traditional art activities including painting, portraits, casting and sculpture.

- The Art of Distraction: Pavement Stuff
- Sophie McLeery: Photoshop
- Ruth Hage: Face Painting Stuff
- Keith Parkinson: Abstract Stuff
- Charlotte Carman: Drifting Stuff
- Beverley Chapelhow: Roc Hard Stuff
- Donna McKno: Dotty Art Stuff
- Linda Erliz: Willow Stuff
- Ruth Hemsall: Body Stuff
- Tracey Eastham: Collage Stuff
- Gosha Gibek: Stencil Stuff
- Jose Antony: Food Stuff

A lead artist was engaged to be on site and manage a series of workshops held in an empty shop in Nelson town centre. Artwork produced was then shown for a longer period in the ACE Centre, Nelson.

Project summary in Pendle

| | Pendle |
|------------------------|--------|
| Artists | 11 |
| Participants | 364 |
| Audience live | 364 |
| Audience online | 0 |
| Exhibition days | 7 |
| New artworks | 300 |
| Artist days | 29 |
| Sessions | 14 |



Artist feedback

'I think that is a really good thing for the regeneration of the town centre and I think Nelson needs a bit of that, and so does Blackburn. There is probably towns that don't but I think there are a lot that do, especially in this neck of the woods.'

Artist

'When I have arrived I was welcomed with a big smile. Both Keith and Kirsty were very relaxed and calm and it set up a fantastic, positive atmosphere.'

Gosha, Artist

'I was received in a very friendly manner by Keith who had a lot of support materials available to me ready to go. I appreciated having a friendly chat which made me feel comfortable pre-workshop. Keith was extremely supportive during the workshop using his excellent voice projection and even nipping out to the shop for some materials.'

Tracey Eastham

Visitor feedback

'It has been fun. I've done some face painting. I've face painted 3 people! I did the elephant too. I think that was the best, getting your hands all messy, just sticking stuff on.'

Boy aged 10

'They came from the school with the whole class, and they enjoyed it, they loved it.'

Mother with son

'It's been on all week, I've been in town and seen it. I've come with my two nephews. They just play on the xbox at home normally. I liked it, it was good. I haven't done anything like this in ages.'

Uncle with 2 nephews

'It was fun to do. I've never done anything like this before.'

Mother

Learning points

- Working with schools was a very successful approach – positive comments were received from schools about the workshops delivered during the *LETs do stuff* week.
- Having a consultant artist/project manager was very useful as it allowed one person to take control rather than a panel/group.
- Face to face contact as a marketing tool allowed the public to be encouraged to join in the workshops, and gave the shop a greater presence.
- Artists felt they had received professional development support from the lead artist and several worked with age groups that were new to them.
- New project ideas and commissions are now in the pipeline as a result of the contacts made through the project.
- Condition of premises in the main room was ideal, although other areas of the building could have been improved prior to the event.

9. Learning from LET

Key successes

Audiences were 80% higher than anticipated for the work, and the number of artists involved, 255, was also a great achievement for the programme as it was over five times the number anticipated.

In Blackburn: Reaction from the public was fantastic to the exhibitions; they liked seeing local artists work and being able to view art in the evening was also a plus. Many visitors and artists involved said they would like to see a permanent space with the same remit in Blackburn.

In Burnley: The fact that so much activity was concentrated on the bandstand area near to the LET shop meant that the link was made between these two strands, and locals understood the variety and the amount of work that was going on as part of the project. Support and good networks with local shop owners meant that a knitting group started as part of the programme is now an on-going, community-run weekly activity. Generally shop visitors and locals are pleased and proud of the Council for backing such an initiative, and awareness seemed high that this is who was behind the work.

In Hyndburn: The Crocheting Accy project in particular was really well-loved by participants, with many using the group as a way of communicating with others, a space to come together, talk and share problems. The group shared craft skills, and the other artists were intrigued and inspired by working alongside this art form.

In Pendle: Working with schools was a very successful approach and positive comments were received from schools about the workshops delivered during the LETs do stuff week. With limited time available bringing school groups in meant that large numbers were engaged with the project in a very cost effective way. Many pupils on weekday school visits brought their parents back with them again at the weekend.

Difficulties faced

Creating awareness

Although there was a central marketing officer working to publicise the project, visitors locally said they wanted to hear more about the project as often they'd only seen it passing by. Creating awareness locally was an issue as often shop units were only secured last minute due to the difficulty in obtaining them, so creating and distributing print well in advance wasn't possible.

Multiple agendas

Juggling several agendas made producing work sometimes difficult, keeping the Council's needs in mind as well as what the public wanted wasn't easily achieved.

Negative assumptions

Negative assumptions can abound when people know that the Council are backing a project – wrongly assuming that rates won't be paid or rent needed. Clear communication on the investment made may help.

Working in shop spaces

Working in a shop space presented a host of issues in itself. The artists that were first to use the shop space encountered the most practical problems in getting the space fit for use, which ate into delivery time. The suggestion was made that a walk

through the space in advance of the residency with the project team and artists would have helped identify potential issues earlier.

Identifying shops to use was also a problem. Absent landlords meant that often it was hard to identify who owned a property, and Council links were surprisingly hard to take advantage of.

Strengths emerging

Developing artists professionally

Skills and career development for creative businesses involved were a key strength of the programme. Artists felt they had received professional development support from the Arts Officers, Council staff and lead artists/ project managers, and several worked with age groups that were new to them.

Sharing ideas and information across the key partners

The partnership was able to share learning as they progressed through regular partnership meetings and informal calls and emails to ask questions and share ideas, information and marketing communication.

Creating new contacts, audiences and networks for artists/creative businesses

This model provided a chance for local creative industries to test markets and work in new collaborative partnerships, as well as meet new people to develop future collaborations. Networking of artists using the shop enabled skill sharing and development from one organisation/installation to the next. Support from arts development officers played a key role in this, and new project ideas and commissions are now in the pipeline as a result of contacts made through the project.

Recommendations for the future

Using the key learning points from the project, the following act as a checklist for running projects like LET in the future:

1. Employ a lead artist or project manager who can be onsite, help with planning and resources and also mentor the artists involved – this worked really well as a model and would be recommended for future projects.
2. Have a site walk through with both artists and project managers as soon as a unit is secured, to enable trouble-shooting to take place before residencies begin and to allow maximum quality delivery time.
3. Communicate early and as effectively as possible with local shop owners. They can be a great source of positive (as well as negative) word of mouth.
4. Find ways to share learning throughout the project, for example through regular partnership meetings.
5. Ensure there is clear and well positioned information for visitors and shoppers showing opening times, who is in the shop, what's going on in there and welcoming them in.
6. Make sure the audience are aware of the investment made, and that Council projects make an equal investment as commercial ones would in terms of rent and rates etc.
7. Work together to secure funding and deliver projects: partnership working enables stronger, more varied and longer-term programmes to be delivered.
8. Look for where legacy work can be supported after the project ends, through community champions taking on workshops or regular meetings.