

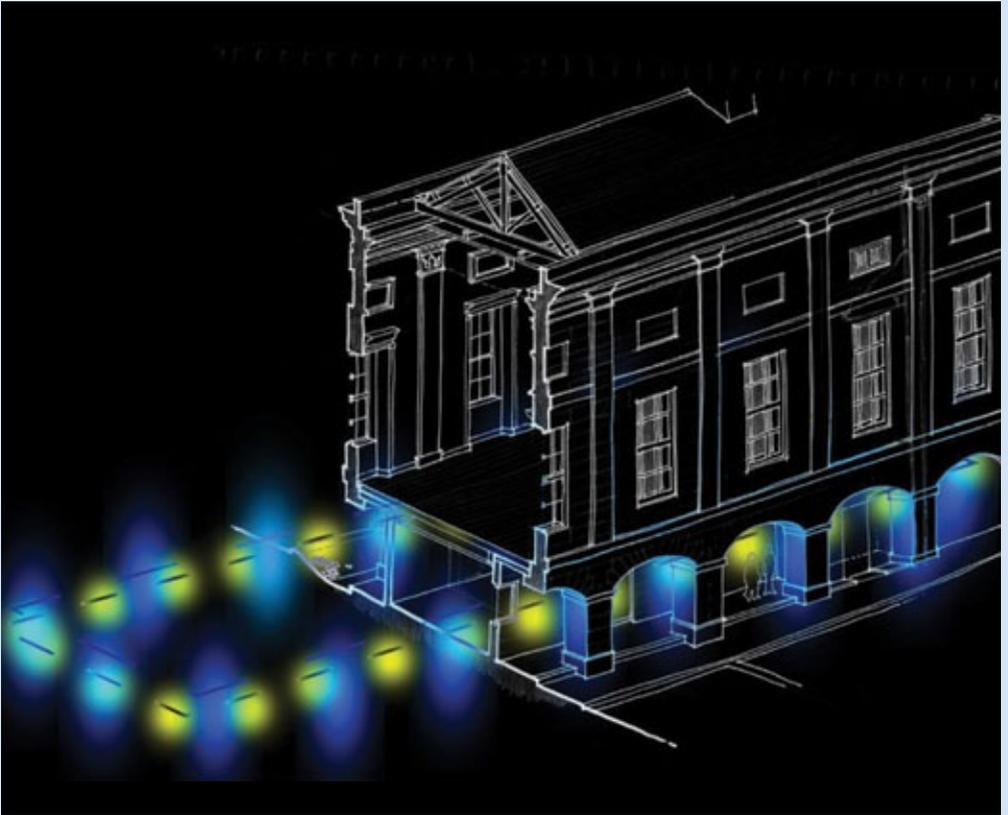
Public Art Strategy
Alnwick, Northumberland





Overview

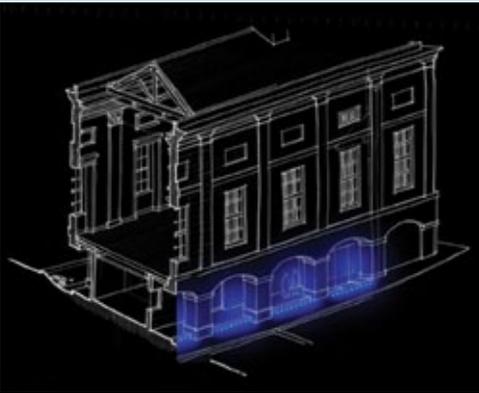
Inspire Northumberland and Alwick Community Development Trust have commissioned artist Simon Watkinson to develop a public art strategy for Alwick town centre. Quality design and artistic interventions are a catalyst to raise profile and the economic impacts and social benefits can be significant. This publication demonstrates the proposals for the town that focus on the medium of light to enhance the built environment and to bring life to the character of Northumberland Hall. There is potential to extend this theme by incorporating lighting into the floorscape and marking entrances, exits and journeys through Alwick's fascinating lanes for local people and visitors to experience and explore.



Option 1 – Open Arcade

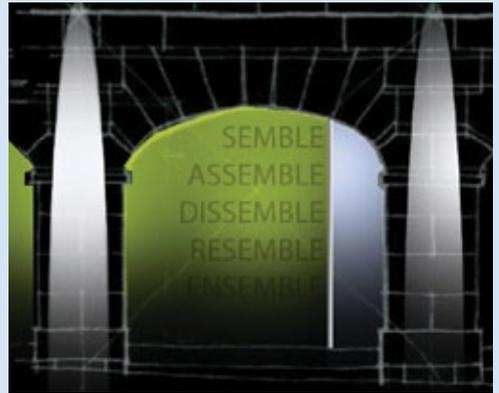
This option is the simplest and perhaps the most effective. Exploiting the pre-existing cabling and power supply as well as the enclosed space, it draws people into the building's surround in an animated light show. Emulating the pedestrian flow that circulates the building the lighting would be programmed to apparently circumscribe the space, threading through the roof space as a series of off-set dashes. The use of computer driven (DMX control) programmes means that individual programmes can be downloaded, specific to particular events; these can be set throughout the entire year to highlight specific calendar dates and times.

All colours are determined through the programming process. Animating the arcades at street level reflects the threshold quality that the building possesses. People circulate through and around the space, and the human scale of the arcade means the lighting does not overwhelm the building or the adjacent Market Place. The circulating lights can switch direction, change speed, as well as the obvious colour changes available. The enclosed nature of the space ensures the light acts to elevate the building, creating a sense of it almost 'floating' in the space.



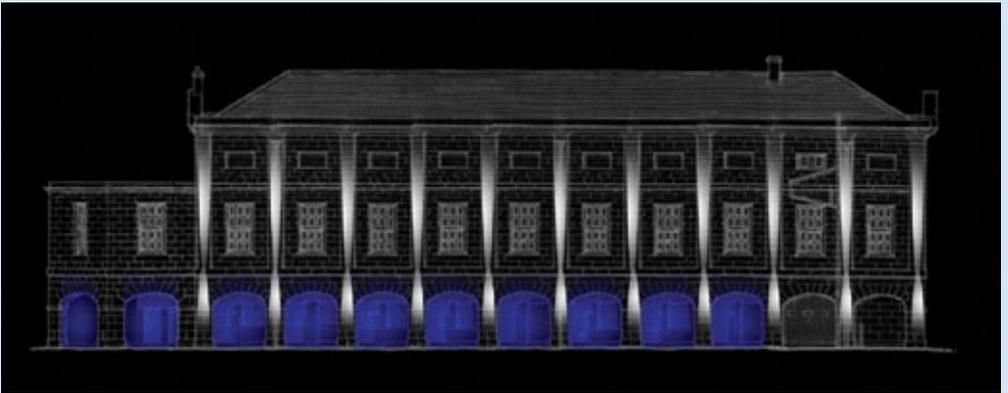
Option 2a – Closed Arcade (setts lighting)

The use of ground located glass sett lighting means this option could in fact be unrolled across the site as a means of highlighting specific buildings or access routes. There is a possibility to explore both options 1 and 2 since one is part of the hard landscaping and one associated with the building itself. No colour changing option exists, so this is a more sedate choice, but one that has wider reaching opportunities. This robust and elegant fitting is particularly suited to the cobble sett detail that surrounds the building. It could be similarly used to highlight nominated buildings and or routes within the townscape, providing a low-key but legible guide throughout the area.



Option 2b – Closed Arcade (concealed fittings)

This option involves integrating the light fittings into or adjacent to the new glazed infills proposed for the building. To register clearly a treatment (sandblasting/manifestation film) would be required on the glass. This presents the opportunity for a visual motif to be included. Programming could be achieved through the DMX process, or by pre-loaded shows. It will necessitate close collaboration between the architectural specification of the glazing and the lighting details.



Option 3 – Illuminated Elevation

This is perhaps the most formal option. The previous options are both LED fittings, with minimal maintenance. This option may use non-LED fittings along with the associated maintenance/replacement costs.

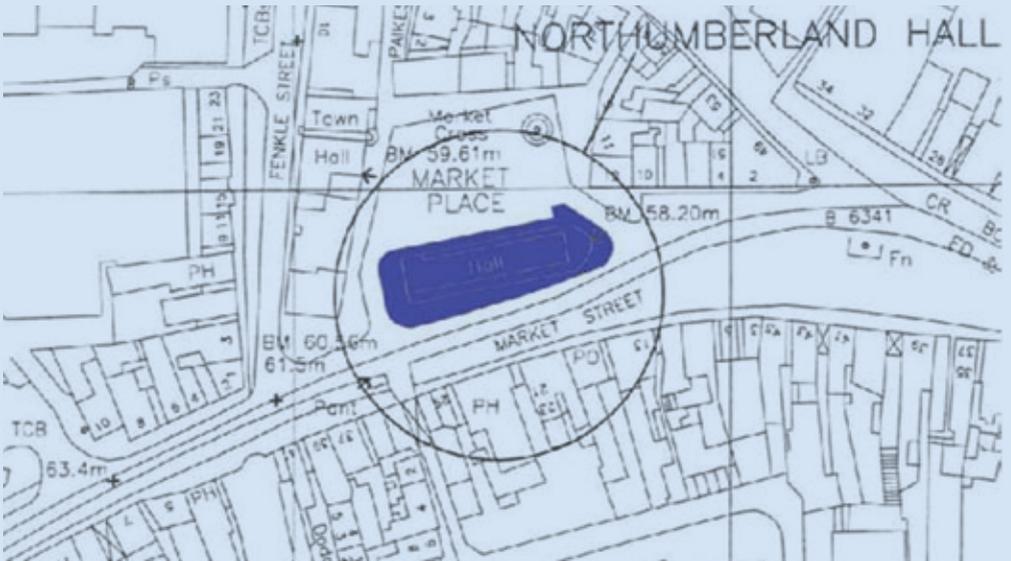
Illuminating the elevation itself is obviously an opportunity to be considered, whilst paying due attention to the scale of the surrounding architecture. It is important not to consider it in isolation from other options, since the human scale of the building is particularly significant at street level.

Infilling the arches with glazing, whilst closing the arcade would present the opportunity for an imaginative detailing of the panels, perhaps creating an offset spacing to create a rhythmic and contemporary counterpoint to the arches themselves. Alongside this would be the need to provide some form of manifestation on the glass providing an opportunity to include a form of visual motif. The play on words around assemble creates an interesting and oblique reference to the Hall's uses. Introduced as a manifestation film, or etched into the glass itself, the words act to gather the projected light.



Option 4 – Integrate Lighting into Canopy (spill)

Unlike the previous options this involves using the light fittings to throw colour onto the surrounding space. Simon Watkinson likes this notion of ‘spill’ to extend the presence of the building and spread it across the space. In many respects it is about using the building to light the area around it. Again it may be possible to combine this and other options to maximum effect, and a close involvement with the detailing of the canopy would be demanded. The additional option to uplight from the canopy could be explored. This canopy based option is more about extending the scope of the Hall within its setting.



Proposals

In developing this strategy to introduce light and text to Alnwick town centre, Simon Watkinson felt that the focus should be physically concentrated on one of the town's most significant buildings, Northumberland Hall (also known as the Assembly Rooms and the Shambles). He examined how it relates to the central triangular site in the town centre and felt the need to reinforce the buildings attachment to the adjacent group, and its role in enclosing the Market Place. The arcade itself is an excellent means of integrating the building since it invites people in, provides shelter and the time and space to dwell. Similarly it harks back to the original state of the building being a shelter only, with no enclosed space for the meat market. This sense in which the building could be passed through is an important one in considering the space. The arcade also provides a significant quality of contained darkness suited to illumination. The building is a form of gate or threshold to the Market. Without the arcade the building presents a flat facade, less interesting to light, and a less inclusive proposition to the space. Though it is a later addition it provides several valuable qualities.

The following options indicate ways in which lighting and text could be used to enhance the Hall's setting within the townscape, establishing it as a visual landmark in the hours of darkness.



Simon Watkinson

Following his time spent working in Holland, Simon returned to the North East of England to establish a practice tackling a range of public realm schemes and temporary interventions. Consciously choosing to work outside the gallery he has striven to create work that evolves from a consideration of Place. This tackles both the physical and the social aspects of each environment he works in. The outcomes continue to be quite distinct from one another in terms of scale, material, and imagery, always trying to conjure contemporary responses to local/ associated materials and themes.

The need to respond sensitively to the changing nature of the sites in which he works has resulted in a wide range of approaches being undertaken. This is manifested through temporary projects both here and abroad and by a range of permanent public realm commissions across the UK. Recurring traits are beginning to emerge in the work, the use of lighting being one, but all are very carefully evolved from a direct engagement with the area, coupled with the realisation that as an artist his interest is in creating spaces, defining edges and boundaries, thresholds and open spaces.

www.simonwatkinson.com

Inspire Northumberland advise, advocate and deliver public art and design projects in the regeneration areas across Northumberland. We identify opportunities where innovative artists and designers can bring unique and exciting perspectives to projects that make them inspirational.

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