



# OTTERPOOL PARK

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**OTTERPOOL PARK** A VISIONING REPORT  
**FOR CREATIVE FOLKESTONE**

[www.otterpoolpark.org](http://www.otterpoolpark.org)



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# Otterpool Park Garden Town

A flagship new town in and for the UK

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**Building houses or creating homes?**

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**Developing a vibrant community or a drowsy dormitory?**

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**Art, culture and creativity integrated at the core or exiled to the margins?**

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**An inclusive or an exclusive urban development?**

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**Innovation or orthodoxy?**

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**Looking optimistically ahead or gazing nostalgically backwards?**

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**Technocratic or human-centred?**

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**Qualitative and quantitative?**

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**Otterpool local + Otterpool global = Otterpool glocal?**

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**Creating a town where you would choose to live?**

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*“ Arts Council England champions and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people’s lives all over the UK. We support activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Our mission is to make great art available to everyone.*

*ACE believes that a high quality, vibrant, well-resourced and well networked arts and culture infrastructure of museums, libraries, theatres, and venues for performance and music of all kinds makes a significant contribution to the economic wealth and growth of towns and cities. This comes in the form of a “double-benefit” – the art and culture sector in itself drives economic growth (being a crucial part of and contributing to other elements of the wider creative industries), but it also materially contributes to how attractive a place is to other businesses and people. People want to live in interesting places, places which provide an opportunity for a strong cultural life and where children will grow up with access to arts and culture. However, “place making” with art and culture at its heart needs to be a l part of the planning of new places from the start. It is as much about advocacy, planning and development as it is about investment.*



*East Kent is already rich in arts and culture with the towns of Folkestone, Canterbury and Margate leading the way. We commend Arcadis and Folkestone and Hythe District Council for having the foresight and vision to include a cultural and creative strategy at the master planning stage of Otterpool Park. This new town will be all the richer for it, both materially, culturally and creatively. The proximity of Otterpool Park to Folkestone in particular means it can benefit from, and complement, the incredibly successful and pioneering creative regeneration programme that we have seen in the town since 2002.* ”

**Sir Nicholas Serota,**  
*Chair, Arts Council England*

# Envisioning Otterpool

## Otterpool needs a soul

Otterpool will be the best new town in and for the UK. It will be significant locally as a great place to live, work and come together. In parallel, Otterpool will attract national and international attention, adding to growing local pride and the sense of belonging. But if Otterpool is to be a success, it will need to have a soul.

It will need to develop its own identity, its own **values**, its own **traditions**, its own **customs** and its own **culture**. At the same time it will need to embrace its existing indigenous natural and heritage assets. Although immense in scale, Otterpool will need to deliver a deeply human experience that takes account of the rich diversity of its inhabitants and that builds an open, vibrant, confident, inclusive and creative community. And so, from the very outset, the imaginative and transformative forces of art, culture and creativity will be vital in making Otterpool distinct and authentic, a place which people of all kinds enthusiastically choose to live in and, most of all, a place with a soul.

**The creation of any new town is a very rare and exciting opportunity in this country. The creation of a garden town is even more rare, which makes the development of Otterpool incredibly exciting for all involved. It is in itself an act of epic imagination and creative endeavour.**

New town development in the UK has not always been regarded as a success. While there are some outstanding, internationally-celebrated examples of success, more often than not new town development has been perceived as a failure. When we think of the new towns built through the 1940s and 1950s, including Basildon, Bracknell, Corby, Crawley, Harlow, Hatfield, Peterlee, Runcorn, Skelmersdale, Stevenage and Telford, soul is perhaps the last word that might come to mind to describe them.

“ *I'm delighted to endorse this Creative Vision on behalf of Folkestone & Hythe District Council. We have always been clear that the arts and creative industries should be at the heart of Otterpool Park's identity – just as it is for much of the rest of the district. We're fortunate to have a vibrant range of creative and cultural activity and we will continue to work with our partners, including Creative Folkestone, to ensure this philosophy is embedded in this flagship community to the benefit of everyone living and working there, and in the wider community.* ”

**Councillor David Monk**, Leader of Folkestone & Hythe District Council



**Platform** Photo credit: Peter Fry. Artist: Angus Ross. Images courtesy of Canterbury City Council.

For many outsiders these rigidly-masterplanned new towns are thought of, perhaps unfairly, as ugly, dull, brutalist, monotonous, colourless places, almost akin to Communist-era, machine-like urban developments. At the time that they were built, those 'overspill' towns nearest to London were mocked as "Cockney Siberias".

These drab towns, with their identikit housing estates, artificial lakes, concrete shopping centres, ambitious roundabouts and worthy public art, are seen as lacking in spirit, imagination and individuality and missing an emotional core, a sense of a vibrant civic and community life or a sense of cherished heritage and embedded culture. In the contentious lists of "Crap Towns" that have been published over the last two decades, these towns feature prominently. They are not towns that immediately make the heart sing. Most of all, they are characterised as being soulless.

These towns were planned in the immediate Post-WW2 period of national emergency with their first priority importantly being to meet 'basic needs' - especially housing and employment - and urgently to put the hard physical infrastructure in place to deliver these 'basic needs'. Unfortunately installing the hard infrastructure alone does not create an attractive and dynamic community, just as building a house does not automatically make it a home. These towns have subsequently spent decades having to retrofit a sense of local culture and distinctiveness, to make them more than a place just to live and work and shop.



**Otterpool will be very different. From the very beginning it will generate rather than having to regenerate. It will learn from the multiple successes and mistakes of the past. It will literally bring a breath of fresh air, in one of the greenest new towns ever created. From the outset it will do far more than deliver 'basic needs'. Rather than having to operate in emergency mode with a fierce sense of urgency, Otterpool can grow a little**

**more slowly and organically. It will be able to respond to and incorporate constantly shifting demographic, social, technological, economic and cultural trends, in order to accommodate deeply personal, human needs in genuinely pioneering ways and not just to produce technocratic solutions in a crisis. And to ensure success art, culture and creativity will need to be at the centre of this aspirational, long-term, organic growth.**

“ *I am delighted to support the new cultural and creative strategy for the Otterpool Park garden town development. This is a unique opportunity to build a new community inspired by the culture and heritage of the area, but which will also be home to new generations of creative people who will leave their mark in east Kent. Otterpool Park can be a hub for people who work in the creative industries, both locally and in London, as well as being a place of beauty in its own right. It is excellent that these principles are forming part of the forward planning for Otterpool Park, right from the start.* ”

**Damian Collins**, MP for Folkestone and Hythe  
Chair of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee

# A vision for Otterpool

## A new garden town with soul, led by values

Closed, cold-hearted, claustrophobic, ugly, exclusive, standardised, inward-looking, dull, traditional, unaffordable, ghettoised, bland, nostalgic, unfriendly, conformist, contained, pessimistic, suburban, bureaucratic, disconnected, uniform, atomised, ambitionless, parochial, miserable, prejudiced, mediocre...

...from all the many conversations that have taken place about the future of Otterpool, none of these terms apply.

Instead, everyone involved seems to be genuinely excited, inspired, hugely ambitious and forcefully determined that the very highest aspirations are raised and delivered, and that Twenty-First Century values and frames are confidently foregrounded, as plans for this vitally important and nationally and internationally significant new garden town move forward.

The new Otterpool has instead been described as:



Of all of these terms, or values, for the future Otterpool, those that have consistently stood out in people's tracing of the personality or DNA of the town are Open and Outward-looking, Vibrant and Creative, Diverse and Innovative, all of which are central to artistic, cultural and creative practice.

## Open and Outward-looking

Whilst Otterpool will be purposefully hyperlocal, everyone insists that it will not be parochial or insular, cut off from the outside world. The town needs to be hyperconnected to, learn from, and contribute to broader regional, national and international ideas, trends, movements and events. It needs to seek out new partnerships, networks and collaborations and be open to enthusiastically sharing its own achievements with the wider world. The most immediate connection will be with Folkestone. Vitally, rather than replicating what Folkestone already has or becoming in some ways a competitor community, Otterpool will be a good neighbour to, and add significant value to, Folkestone and be open to fresh and mutually-beneficial cooperation and alliances, especially through arts and culture. From the start Folkestone will provide Otterpool with facilities and opportunities such as for theatre, dance, music and art. Overtime Otterpool will reciprocate giving Folkestone a country setting for activities. Equally Otterpool will make strong and active partnerships across and beyond Kent. This ready connectedness will be boosted by the superfast broadband and IT infrastructure planned for the town.



*The Big Lunch at Payers Park, Folkestone's Creative Quarter, June 2017. Image courtesy of Creative Folkestone and Ben Bowles.*



## Vibrant and Creative

Otterpool will not be a hushed dormitory settlement only serving commuters who spend very little time in their community. Nor will it be a sleepy suburb with all the stereotypical associations with prim privet hedges, cookie-cutter faux-Tudor houses and twitching net curtains.

**As a town it will foreground vibrancy and dynamic community life with the full range of activities, events, traditions and celebrations that most towns enjoy.**

Much of this vibrancy can be delivered through arts, cultural and creative means, through the imaginative reuse of existing buildings such as the barns through to live performances and

festivals and the creation of new civic facilities and spaces open to all, alongside multiple activities generated by residents themselves. Thus Otterpool will be seen by residents and outsiders as a genuinely creative community where things are made as well as being consumed.



## Diverse

Otterpool cannot be a gated community welcoming only one part of the population and excluding others. It will accommodate existing residents but welcome outsiders too. All successful communities are mixed and are necessarily complicated and in some ways unpredictable. **If it is to work Otterpool will need to seek diversity.** Today the UK is renowned globally for the diversity of its citizens and the relative ease in which people of such different kinds live, on the whole, peaceably side by side. London has recently overtaken New York and Toronto as the most diverse city in the world and other UK cities are following close behind. It is this intense diversity and tolerance that drives community development, maximises creativity and boosts economic growth. Without this rich diversity, the UK would not be acknowledged as one of the world's most creative nations.



## Innovative

Otterpool will not stand still as a community – or a set of buildings – preserved in aspic, like the model village of Bekonscot in Beaconsfield or the plastic fantasies of Legoland in Windsor or, some might argue, Poundbury in Dorset. If it is to be a success, and steadily build local pride as well as growing national and international attention and, critically, maintain its competitiveness, **Otterpool will need to make room for bold innovation, experimentation, ingenuity and risk-taking.** It will need constantly to embrace novel approaches and unanticipated new solutions as the community shifts, people's needs inevitably change, new generations emerge, and future technologies create exciting new possibilities: 3D printed houses perhaps, self-healing concrete, driverless vehicles or robot workforces. What are the implications of artificial intelligence, big data, algorithms and virtual and augmented reality for Otterpool's diverse communities in the years to come? Or the medium and longer-term impact of climate change? Or more simply, new ways of the community organising itself. Everything therefore should not, and cannot, be fixed down from Day One. There needs to be in-built flexibility and ample space for organic change. Often change initiated by Otterpool's diverse communities themselves. **Thus alongside the installation of the hard infrastructure, consideration must be given at the very earliest stages to the softer infrastructures – the cultural software – that will enable this constant intelligence-driven innovation to sustain and flourish.**



# Five core propositions for the cultural and creative contribution to Otterpool

## Cultural Integration

### Otterpool enmeshes art, culture and creativity in every aspect of life

Today art and culture are no longer contained solely in formal structures such as theatres, concert halls or museums and art galleries but are increasingly a part of everyday life. The formal structures remain vitally important and add hugely to civic vibrancy, learning and economic impact but it is culture and creativity more widely distributed and applied that is interesting and important now. Culture and creativity are now playing a role in, and finding solutions for, forces and services that shape our lives, including health and well-being, lifelong learning, special needs and care services, transport, crime and prisons through to conflict resolution and international development. Many artists and creative practitioners in the UK have today stepped out of their studios and workspaces determined to make a difference in the world, to collaborate with others and to address much wider issues than simply making an art product or performance. They are making real and sustained impact in applying themselves to issues and problems and opportunities that those in other walks of life, including those shaping and running services, are facing of which Folkestone itself is a prime example. This accelerating



shift is building upon 50 years of community and participative arts and creative practice in the UK that acknowledges that most people themselves are creative in their own right. **Otterpool will therefore need to pursue a cultural vision that steps far beyond that which might be expected in a new town: the primary expectation being that all new towns prioritise public art.**



*Crossing Lines* outdoor performance, Radnor Park, Folkestone, June 2018. Image courtesy of Creative Folkestone and Ben Bowles.

Most post-war New Towns are associated with public art...sculptures and other artistic forms placed out in the streets, on roundabouts and in civic squares and shopping centres. The concrete cows of Milton Keynes are by now famous but many other new towns followed the same route. From the outset, Harlow displayed sculptures by Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore in an effort to make the town appear 'cultured'. And there are outstanding examples of public art over the centuries, in the UK and far beyond.

**But creative and cultural practice has, and is, changing fast and there is valuable practice that goes beyond the 'art object', the sculpture in the plaza, to be plonked down in public places, towards what a friend and artist calls 'social sculpting', artistic practice that is generated through and shaped by deep connections with communities themselves.**

**Therefore Otterpool needs to have a much broader vision of what art, culture and creativity can do and be at the leading edge of contemporary practice, rather than following others. And most crucial of all, art, culture and creativity needs forcefully to be enmeshed in every process involved in the ultimate creation of Otterpool, including the critical planning and design processes, rather than being an afterthought or simply icing on the cake. How could this be made a reality?**

# Creative learning

## Otterpool as a pioneer of creative education in the UK

Education represents perhaps the richest seam for exploration in terms of the cultural vision for Otterpool. The schools and learning institutions created in the town should be, at their very best, one of the powerful engines of the community and one of the engines of creativity too. For people already living in the area, and for those considering moving to Otterpool – and especially young parents and people in their 20s and 30s wanting to start a family – schools and learning provision will be one of the first things that they will check out. What will Otterpool offer in terms of a Twenty-First Century education?

Every education expert around the world now suggests that children and young people need to be prepared for a future that is as yet unknown but one that will be dramatically different to today given the rapidly accelerating pace of change and disruption. In order to survive and thrive in such a complex environment, young people will need a different set of skills, tools and aptitudes than that provided by traditional learning systems and pedagogies. They will need to be open, flexible, cooperative and creative. It was in response to this challenging reality that, at the start of the last decade, Creative Partnerships was launched across England. Creative

Partnerships (CP) was the first nationally-coordinated programme of creative learning in schools anywhere in the world. East Kent was one of the first CP locations.



Rather than confining art, culture and creativity to a school's art classroom or the IT suite, CP stressed the need for creativity to be embedded in the ethos of the school and to be addressed in and beyond the curriculum. Most importantly CP brought outsiders into the school, particularly artists and other creative practitioners, to become part of the school community, over several months to a year or longer, rather than being invited in for half a day a term, at maximum, which had been the previous reality in many schools. Even more importantly artists and other creative practitioners worked closely alongside, rather than apart from, the existing teaching staff as a co-learning force and, over time, engaged with parents and carers, the school management and the wider community.

In some cases, CP was not quite as effective as had been hoped, for a wide range of reasons. For example, when CP was first launched many schools had already had a number of other 'government schemes' imposed upon them and CP was perceived as adding to the pressure even though this had never been the intention for CP from the outset. In some schools CP was seen by staff as simply being a grander version or extension of the 'arts education' programmes that had been sustained over decades, rather than CP being seen as a much fresher, broader and bolder adventure in creative learning and not just in the arts. In others the school leadership disputed the role of creativity in learning. But then in many many other schools the CP programme was a part of gradually turning the culture of the school around and demonstrating the deep value of creativity in the development of young people in learning environments and of the school staff and families too. And thousands of the artists and other practitioners directly involved also suggested that they themselves had found it hugely important in the development of their own practice and their philosophy as well as providing a necessary income in what, for many, is a financially precarious life.

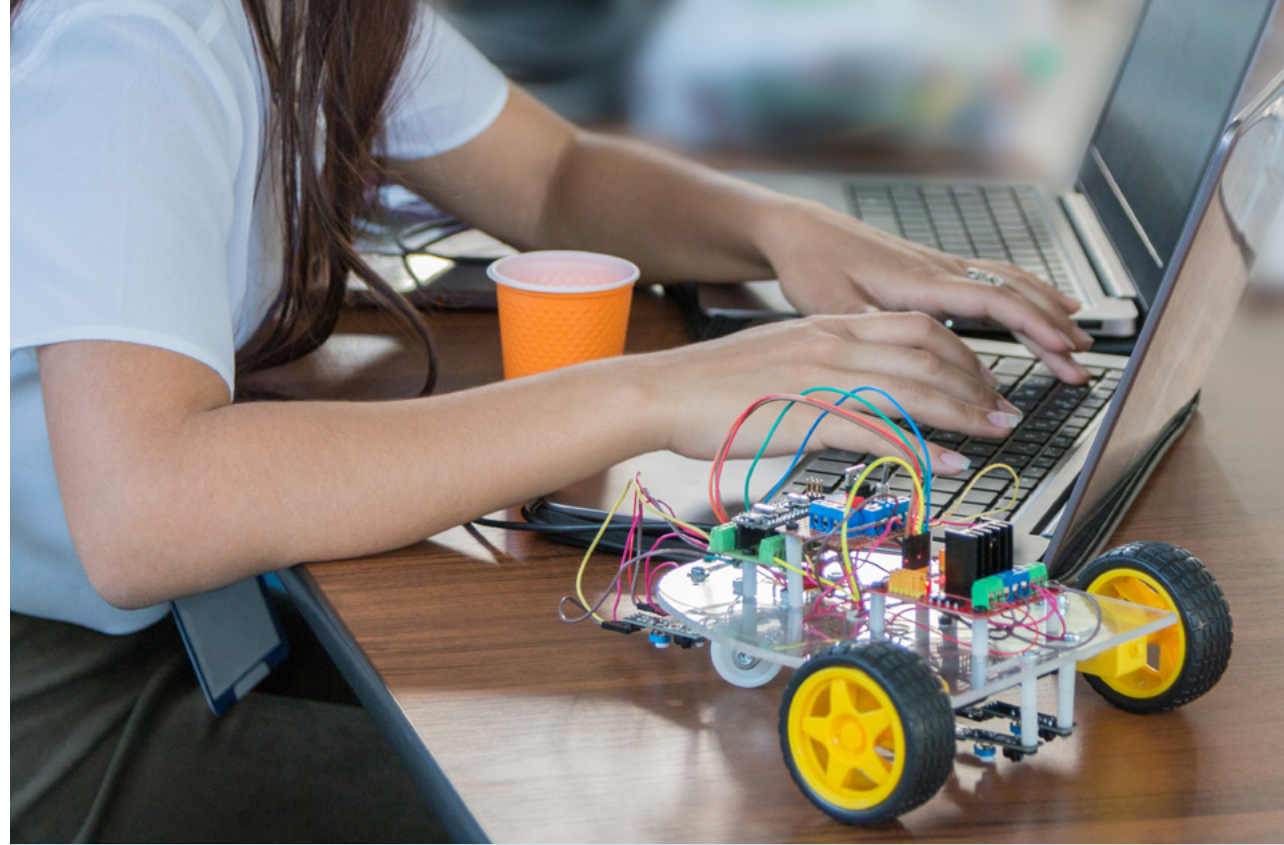
**Creative Partnerships no longer exists as a national programme, though the legacy persists in many schools and other countries around the world have since created their own version. But the CP philosophy, the radical approaches taken and the lessons learned - for example the most successful CP programmes involved whole-school, whole-staff approaches - could be enthusiastically taken up in Otterpool from the outset and tailored to fit identified local needs, establishing Otterpool as a leader in creative education in the UK.**



Lubaina Himid, *Jelly Mould Pavilion*, 2017, part of Folkestone Artworks.  
Image courtesy of Creative Folkestone and Ben Bowles.



In forming an Otterpool approach to creative learning, inspiration might also be drawn from schools that blossomed in the UK through the 1970s and 1980s. Prioritising the idea of the “Open School”, these establishments aimed to “turn the school into a community and the community into a school”. Rather than school buildings, sports and other facilities and the school grounds being used only during conventional school hours – 8am to 3.30-4pm – the community schools extended the opening hours into the evening to enable community access to the buildings and resources making the schools shared facilities. In some cases they envisaged the whole school site as being available to the entire community without the need for fences or gates. Equally the whole of the town was imagined as a site of learning for all. This radical approach, with the school as a vibrant hub, produced the maximisation of shared resources and encouraged intergenerational and lifelong learning through seeing the school as a core active tool for the whole community and not just a structure built in the community. In this exchange environment residents, including elderly people, and schoolchildren and teaching staff, could learn from one another in their respective areas of speciality: cooking perhaps, craft, growing food, learning a language or coding and computer skills. As an additional benefit the schools were kept open during holiday periods for community benefits and, in many cases, were used by artists of all kinds as temporary studio, rehearsal and performance spaces during these periods. In some cases artists had workspace in a school all year round. These community schools were thus more than just schools.



**So in Otterpool schools should be one of the most vital engines of community development and learning, resourceful hubs for the community, generators of employment for artists and creative practitioners and shapers of the next generation of Otterpool’s creative citizens.**





# A journey towards user-led design and architecture

## Otterpool designed and built with its citizens

To state the very obvious, the creative practices of design and architecture (and landscaping and engineering) are vital for the success of Otterpool. Building Otterpool is in itself a cultural act. Everyone has been clear that the highest quality has to be achieved. It should be distinctive and confident. It should be world-class. Only the very best will do.

### **But what does this mean?**

- How will creative and cultural expertise be woven into the specification and commissioning processes?
- How will 'commercial considerations' or 'market forces' impact on what is finally built?
- And critically, who in the end will decide what that quality?

The cultural vision has to help in answering these questions and provide some practical footsteps in the long journey ahead. A start, perhaps, is establishing some principles for discussion during the planning process. Principles that might then be amalgamated into policy.

### **Public procurement**

From the outset the public sector should boldly lead the way in setting an example of both process and final quality. Civic assets, buildings and spaces, including the new nurseries, schools and other learning institutions, libraries, surgeries and health centres, care homes, sports and gym facilities, parks and play areas, hubs and co-working spaces, administration centres and streets and squares that collectively define Otterpool's shared public facilities, should be specified as innovative, C21st, forward-facing developments rather than traditional and backward-looking. In a way Otterpool can reinvent how the public and civic realm is imagined and delivered. The developers cannot and should not set the framework or agenda for this realm: public voices and expertises need to be closely involved throughout.

## Re-igniting Heritage

The multiple existing heritage assets in Otterpool are essential in establishing a sense of place. Imagining Otterpool as a community of up to 30,000 people is an incredibly exciting and yet simultaneously humbling, if not a little daunting, prospect. Broadstairs, Chichester, Farnham, Frome, Hertford, Stratford-Upon-Avon and Weybridge are all historically and culturally-rich towns developed over a millennia, with populations under 30,000 people today. You are suddenly struck with how vast Otterpool will be and, at the same time, with the scale of the task ahead in terms of shaping its core, its identity, its lived reality. Yet Otterpool is not exactly starting with a clean sheet. It does, and will, have a story to tell. Unlike Ebbsfleet, it is not on a brownfield, partly degraded and polluted site. The largely green site itself is beautiful and what is already there in terms of indigenous culture, from the barrows to the barns, will be essential in telling Otterpool's story. Some of these heritage assets are already in public ownership. Others are likely to move from private hands to become cherished public assets, new additions to the civic realm. None however should be frozen in time and, as a principle, collectively they should be seen as living assets. Therefore designers and architects involved in their reinvention should be guided towards contemporary forms as much as conservation approaches.



Shingle House Photo credit: [www.living-architecture.co.uk](http://www.living-architecture.co.uk)

## The Kentish Vernacular

Whilst the design and architectural vision is to be world-class, being world-class does not mean simply importing models from elsewhere. Many have rightly stressed the need for Otterpool's design and architecture to take account of the history and complexities of the site, as above, and particularly of 'Kentish' and regional design traditions and applying these 'with a twist' in some of the built environment, including the publicly-procured developments. Thus the right expertise in the Kentish vernacular, in terms of historical knowledge and in terms of people with building skills, needs to be located and made available at the earliest stage. How will this be done?

## Encouraging and commissioning younger talent

In so many cases only the most well-established design and architectural practices, led by the most national and international famous names, are given the opportunity to be involved in large-scale development. This may be the case for some of the design and architectural commissioning of the civic realm - and potentially the developer-led homes and other infrastructure - in Otterpool. This would be to great effect, especially in putting the town 'on the map' at an early stage and raising the level of ambition. But the result of this conventional and perhaps slightly lazy approach, of only appointing 'starchitects' and world-famous designers, is that younger, less established individuals and practices who have so much to offer do not get a look in. Formalised competition processes, such as that pursued by the RIBA, mitigate against younger talent. Whilst larger, well-established practices have teams responsible for entering competitions, smaller and younger practices cannot afford the time or the cost. As a principle ways should be found, including open 'ideas competitions' with multidisciplinary and independent judging panels, from the very beginning.

## Developing local design and architectural capacity

In other European countries, including in The Netherlands, local and often younger practices are creating homes and other buildings of high architectural and design merit but it is much more difficult to do this in the UK, especially outside the major cities. Local talent generally gets overlooked. Therefore,



Urban Sports Park Photo credit: Guy Hollaway Architects

in preparing for Otterpool, early consideration should be given to the boosting of local capacity encouraging local practices, working within clear design parameters and supported by design panels, to put forward their ambitious and innovative proposals for Otterpool.

## Celebrating the unconventional

In the public commissioning of design and architecture for the civic realm there should be space too for the eccentric, quirky, unorthodox, unexpected and risky - designs that will surprise, inspire and delight many, and potentially irritate others, again helping to put Otterpool on the map and again providing a sense of identity, as in "Only in Otterpool".

## Encouraging intimacy

Whilst much attention will inevitably be applied to the macro-level of development from the outset the micro-level needs to be brought forwards too. People's quality of life will be influenced not just by buildings but also by the smaller features at street level...the design of lighting and signage, bus stops and benches, bike racks and bollards, playground equipment and pedestrian crossings, pavements, parks and planting, even items as small as drain covers. Artists and designers of all kinds should be invited to consider these as a series of small, intimate yet coordinated public sector-led commissions.

## Promoting Self-build

Of all aspects of Otterpool's design and architecture this has to be by far the most exciting proposition. But it could easily be sidelined in the rush to build so as a principle during the planning process it needs to be given high profile and held on to firmly, not least because the systems currently mitigate against the possibility of self-build and collaborative building. The potential is clearly enormous, not just in the design and creation of affordable homes but in the production of many other spaces and features, and the ways in which such endeavours are funded. Perhaps a reinvention of the tradition of the tontine? We can look to many successful examples in the UK and internationally that can be brought to the fore at the earliest stage that inform, excite and build confidence in the principle of self and collective design and construction.

## User-centred design

By extension, as an unshakeable principle, Otterpool should explore the practice of users, current and potential, being closely involved in the specification of and decisions about design and architecture, alongside 'experts' with the right expertise and experience working as guides and advisors.

As eventual users they should be part of the process whenever and wherever

possible. Traditionalists will say immediately that 'the general public' knows too little, or is too ignorant, to be 'allowed' to be involved. Yet user-centred design has a long history and thousands of examples can be brought forward for Otterpool. So the question should be asked to the naysayers: why not involve users? One compelling example to foreground is The Sorrell Foundation's *Joined Up Design For Schools* programme which

involved schoolchildren in the design process, as the 'clients', becoming their school's representatives and decision-makers and developing a real sense of ownership. In a primary school in East Kent, 5-year olds became the clients in the redesign of their school's reception area. At first, the internationally-renowned designer who had been commissioned suggested that 5-year olds would know nothing about design. After the project was successfully completed he had the humility to admit that he had been wrong.



# New ways of work

## Otterpool as an explosion of hubs, cooperatives, fab labs and DIY and makerspaces

The last 10 years have seen enormous changes in the nature and form of work, especially in cultural and creative work. We have witnessed a rapid increase in shorter working weeks, part-time working, multiple jobs undertaken by one person, live-work set ups and online businesses. In parallel we have seen the rise of new forms of business incorporation and governance, including

cooperatives, B Corp businesses, CICs and community land trusts, the invention of virtual and local currencies and the acceleration of sharing and exchange economies.

**Of particular relevance to Otterpool is the rapid rise in solo or 2-3 person enterprises, in small start-ups and in freelancing or self-employment.** In London today, 1 job in 4 is already freelance, partly due to the gig economy but also through choice, especially by those under the age of 30. Within ten years it is estimated it will be 1 job in 3. This pattern is being followed around the country. Many of these people do not appear in official employment or economic statistics as they are too micro in scale yet their contribution to the economy, and to society more broadly, is significant.

This change in working patterns has, in part, been facilitated by advances in technology and connectivity and, in part, through an explosion in the opening of new hubs, co-working spaces, shared studios, fab labs, makerspaces, pop-up and meanwhile spaces across the country. Many of these, largely profit-making, work spaces are established on the business model employed by gyms and health clubs: subscription-





based, high membership but lower volume of users on a daily basis. This change is not just occurring in our cities. Most small towns in the UK now have at least one hub or co-working space of some kind. In many other places people are working, not en masse in offices or other formalised work locations, but on laptops and mobile devices in a wide range of public and private spaces from libraries to coffee shops to their front rooms at home.

All of these changes in the way we work today have enormous implications for all aspects of the future planning and delivery of the Otterpool development: for maximising creativity within the community through the provision, via the public, voluntary or private sectors, of a wide range of full cost or subsidised workspace options, alongside Otterpool's civic spaces and public facilities of the future; for boosting employment through SME creation as is already happening

so successfully in Folkestone; for enabling working from home, especially valuable for those caring for children or relatives, which would require architectural solutions in terms of the design of housing; for nurturing collaborations across the community; and for stimulating and increasing learning in and across the community including the acquisition of new skills, tools and tactics. The creation of a wide range of spaces to work would clearly also be of particular value to people in the arts, cultural and creative communities who would be attracted to Otterpool for this reason. The creative economy is today the fastest growing sector in the UK. The latest Government figures indicate that the creative economy is worth £91.8 billion to the economy or more than a quarter of a billion pounds to the UK economy every day. **If Otterpool is to take a part in this booming world then spaces for (creative) working have to feature prominently in the town's plans.**

# A networked Otterpool

**Otterpool as a node in networks of places learning together about how to create and sustain urban wellbeing, resilience, engaged communities and vibrancy**

It is a cliché to suggest that almost everyone, and everywhere, today is hyperconnected, or soon will be. The old notions of being at the centre, and therefore powerful, or at the edge, and therefore peripheral to the mainstream, are rapidly breaking down. In the past, if you lived at the bottom of Cornwall or at the top of the Shetland Islands you would likely feel pretty isolated. But not necessarily today. And the same goes for Otterpool. Otterpool can imagine itself at the centre of the world if it chooses to, rather than seeing itself as a community located on a Southern edge of the UK. And a centre that is connected to multiple rich and mutually-profitable networks which will drive learning, intelligence gathering, skills-sharing, resource capture and overall development more broadly. But which networks would be most valuable? We are all increasingly part of many networks. Many of us complain bitterly about being 'over networked' and not having the time to keep up with any of them. So what will work for Otterpool, especially in widening and deepening the cultural vision?

Perhaps the most significant shift in networks around urban development in the last 5 years has been the emergence of grassroots networks and movements in towns and cities which are reinvigorating the notion that urban settlements have within themselves many of the assets, and not least the human assets,

to be able to make positive, sustainable and long-term change themselves. We now have multiple global city networks including Resilient Cities, Sanctuary Cities, the Fab City Global Initiative, Sustainable Cities, Global Cities, Fearless Cities and the Municipalist Movement. All of these, and others, are brimming with practical ideas and sources of inspiration that would be of great value to Otterpool and equally Otterpool will, over time, be able to return its own ideas and achievements into these global conversations.



# Action going forwards?

## Some initial recommendations

### **Creative Champion: A lead in taking the Cultural Vision for Otterpool confidently forwards**

If the vision outlined above is to become a reality, including the need and desire to enmesh art, culture and creativity within the complex and demanding planning, policy and development processes, and in civic engagement, in the months and years to come, then it will be necessary, as a matter of urgency, to appoint someone to take the lead. This 'Creative Champion' would work energetically and imaginatively to support the masterplanning processes as well as to oversee programmes of cultural and creative activity relating to Otterpool. It is essential to have a cultural expert voice or champion involved in the development and delivery of Otterpool, including representation immediately on the Design Panel and the Place Panel. Strategically and structurally, a continued connection with Creative Folkestone will be important. This would have the added benefit of enabling close liaison between what is already happening in Folkestone and what might happen in Otterpool and prevent any duplication.

### **That's all very well in theory but.....**

This Visioning Report is deliberately high-level and consciously aspirational. But many might legitimately ask what exactly, in reality, some of the propositions would look like on the ground, in everyday life. As a matter of urgency, an expert researcher should be recruited, for a relatively short period, to gather together details and data, vitally including images, of some of the most innovative practice and projects, from the UK and from around the world, to create a compelling database of information and inspiration for everyone involved in creating Otterpool. This resource would inform and invigorate the forthcoming planning processes and stimulate lively discussion and debate, including consultation with publics of all kinds. This rich and stimulating database could include stunning examples of self-build for example or mould-shattering schools and learning institutions or community-invigorating co-working and hub facilities or new forms of civic self-organisation or innovations in urban green living or user-led design or the incorporation of the vernacular in contemporary architecture. Such a collection of inspirations would be invaluable as the Otterpool dream progresses towards reality.



## Artists and the planning and marketing processes

Artists, designers and creative practitioners, based locally or beyond, could play a positive role in developing the plans and dreams for Otterpool. For example, might an artist/poet/storyteller-in-residence be commissioned to capture stories within these processes and ultimately to write 'the' story of Otterpool? Alternatively might artists, designers and creatives be involved in the imagining and production of Otterpool marketing and branding materials for the developers to deliver a different approach to the public presentation of Otterpool on a local, regional and national stage? Or might an artist filmmaker be commissioned to make the film of Otterpool?

## The Otterpool Programme (TOP)

Plan, cost and locate the resources for, an ongoing programme of activities to begin almost immediately. TOP could include a modest extension of existing Folkestone festivals and celebrations in to the Otterpool Area; experiments in the use of assets, spaces and buildings in Otterpool for art, cultural and educational activities; commission artists and performers to respond to Otterpool in unexpected ways.

## Exploring the heritage of Otterpool

Heritage is part of the DNA of Otterpool, it is a baseline yet so far it is little known. Boost public awareness of, participation in and care for the heritage of Otterpool, and appreciation of it as "living heritage", through commissioning a microsite; an oral history recording programme, initially looking at the stories of local residents and workers; a writer and/or academic to amass stories of all the identified heritage assets across the

site and publish these online, ideally in an Ideas Bank; the production of a series of walking tours for immediate use by the public (land ownership allowing) and publish these online; a photographer/filmmaker to

document heritage assets, or invite local photography clubs to do so, and publish online; and finally a series of occasional talks and lectures.

## Investigate the potential for embedding creative learning in schools in Otterpool

As outlined above, Otterpool has the opportunity to stand out on a national stage as a leader in creative learning. An early investigation of the current plans for schooling and learning in the Otterpool is strongly recommended and in the light of this, a detailed report should be commissioned exploring options for the future.

## Intelligence and Inspiration

Design and create an open source, online Ideas Bank for use and inspiration of everyone directly involved in the Otterpool project, and people in general beyond. Materials and resources should include UK and international stories about creating new towns and new communities; new forms of civic, community and social organisation and action; examples of cultural and creative projects that have had deep impact on people, communities and society; successful design and architecture projects and programmes vitally including self-build and collaborative building; and networks that Otterpool should be joining and benefitting from at this early stage.

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**Peter Jenkinson, October 2018**

# About the author

**Peter Jenkinson OBE** is a passionate internationalist and independent creative and cultural agent based in London, UK with extensive experience of working across the world on every continent, in particular with young cultural changemakers and creative activists. In 2018 he has worked in Amsterdam, Brussels, Colombo, Copenhagen, Delhi, Edinburgh, Geneva, Lausanne, New Orleans, New York, Salzburg, Sofia, Stockholm, Tirana and Vienna. Current ventures include ODD, an action research enquiry into global civic and socially-engaged cultural and creative practice with particular focus on people and agencies that pursue positive deviance to make positive change; the creation of a civic hub with young creative Syrian refugees in the city of Gaziantep, Turkey; and the devising and co-facilitating of learning programmes with young cultural innovators and activists working to build community in their cities around the world. Over the last few years his work has included: the co-creation of open, a globally-facing resource focussing on the development of civic infrastructures and tools for hubmaking and collective community building; co-authorship of the British Council's global Culture and Development strategy; support of the evaluation programme of Hivos's Mideast Creatives; the creation and facilitation

of a pan-Mediterranean Pop-Up Creative Hub within the World Summit on Arts and Culture in Malta; the co-devising and delivery of the Cultural Leadership and Innovation Programme over several years, for the Ford Foundation and the British Council across the Middle East and North Africa and of the Creative Hub-Making Programme in Vietnam; faculty of the Hammamet Conference in Tunisia; co-facilitator of the international forum on Living Arts in Post-Conflict Contexts in Phnom Penh, Cambodia to mark the 40th Anniversary of the Genocide; co-curators of Change For A Tenner, an events programme for the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT). He is an ongoing strategic and programme advisor to, and lead co-facilitator of, the Young Cultural Innovators Programme of the Salzburg Global Seminar over the last five years bringing together cultural and creative activists aged 25-35 from over 30 cities across the world; an advisor to Venice Agendas; Associate of Compass, UK; and UK Ambassador to the Alternativet cultural-political party in Denmark. Peter has also served as the 'Pop-Up' Chancellor of Cannon Hill Art School, a temporary and experimental art school or people of all ages in Birmingham, England; cultural advisor to the City of Derry~Londonderry in Northern Ireland-North of Ireland and a member of the core

Bid Team of the city's successful bid to be the first UK City of Culture in 2013; a member of the Culture and Education Committee in preparation for the London Olympics and Paralympics 2012; and a selector for, and presenter on, the Channel 4 Big Art Project. Prior to these adventures Peter has had a distinguished and award-winning career working across museums, the arts and culture, including his role as co-founder of Culture+Conflict, founding director of the £110 million Creative Partnerships creativity in learning programme across England and the creation of and founding director of the world-class £21-million The New Art Gallery Walsall. He is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects and of the Royal Society of the Arts, has been awarded Honorary Doctorates from the University of Central England, the University of Wolverhampton and Plymouth College of Art and was appointed a Freeman of the City of London. Peter has close associations with Folkestone. His grandparents moved to Folkestone after the Second World War and his Dad was born in and went to school in the town. Peter retains many fond memories of countless family holidays in Folkestone and especially endless ice creams!





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