Rosnes Bench Project Final Report

Background
A number of years ago public art team working with Scottish Natural Heritage commissioned artists, Dalziel + Scullion to develop a creative plan for the area of Galloway which was developing and applying for Unesco Biosphere status. At the same time the Forestry Commission was developing the Galloway Forest Park as a Dark Skies Park, one of the best places in the world to look at the stars due to low light pollution. Since Dalziel + Scullion did their creative plan “The Ecology of Place” for this landscape area in Galloway it has been awarded both Dark Skies Park Status and has secured a Unesco Biosphere Reserve Status.

Many aspects of this visionary Creative Plan have now been delivered through Wide Open including a Dark Skies Residency with artists, Jo Hodges and Robbie Coleman. The plan had suggested a festival take place and this was achieved through the development of the Environmental Art Festival, which was located for two days in the Dark Skies Park/ Biosphere.

One of the key elements of the plan was a proposal for a project called Rosnes Bench by Dalziel and Scullion. This was to create an installation of artwork in the Dark Skies Park Biosphere, which helped people stop, be still and reconnect to nature. Dalziel and Scullion felt that creating a large work of sculpture wasn’t appropriate to the place and location and felt the extensive area of landscape needed and multiple installation of work which helped people focus on the landscape environment it was located. It was through this thinking that the concept for Rosnes Bench emerged.
Rosnes Bench The Proposal

The Rosnes Bench proposal was that there will be a beautifully designed ergonomic 'structure', that is replicated and dispersed throughout the district, its function is a simple one, to encourage people to stop, dwell and absorb the context that surrounds them: to examine the tree canopies above them, to listen to a river flowing under them, to hear the cacophony of bird sounds surrounding them, or stare up at a night sky filled with stars.

The Rosnes Benches act almost as sensory receptors that create a charged atmosphere to focus the users attention on their surroundings. The 'benches' are to be positioned in places that offer a particular reward to the visitor, a vantage point, a scented woodland, a melodic river etc, they could be placed in pairs or in groupings of up to four, and there may be a constellation of 30 benches produced. The structures borrow from a long lineage of objects in the landscape, which interact with the human figure; in Scotland in particular we might think of standing and recumbent stones, whose configurations were once used for lunar observations and to mark seasonal changes. Elsewhere stones exist where 'footprints' have been carved, marking folklore or historic importance.

The purpose of the bench is to encourage the user to take time and tune into the immediate sensory environment so it must be comfortable and also be formed in such a manner as to suggest how to recline on the bench. We envisage three forms for the benches. Some benches will be designed so that the head and body is supported to facilitate looking directly upwards towards the movement, the dazzling light and shadows of the leaves in the canopy of trees immediately above.
Securing Support and Investment

Dalziel and Scullion created a promotional film about the project idea and Wide Open began talking to potential partners and investors to raise the investment to turn the project into a reality. There was much support from both Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage to help the move forward. Dumfries and Galloway Council, Creative Scotland and Leader Dumfries and Galloway all saw the potential for the project to help promote the regions landscape asset and engage people with the great outdoors through beautiful and unique artwork multiples which link communities and land together. The breakdown of investment is as follows:

- Creative Scotland £42800
- Dumfries and Galloway Council £10,000
- LEADER Dumfries and Galloway £50,000

Wide Open put around £6000 worth of inkind time from their team to secure funding and to develop and manage the project.

The Project Experience

The project was in development and construction from 21sr January 2013 – December 2013. Artists, Dalziel and Scullion developed the design of the Rosnes Bench and then spoke in detail to a number of manufacturers to find someone able to construct the final benches. Eventually they settled on the Kenny Hunter Studio in Glasgow as the ideal people to construct the benches. Kenny Hunter and his assistant Kenny Mackay started work on developing a prototype for the bench using jesmonite. They developed a mould for the
bench and explored different colours and designs for the Rosnes Bench. During this period they were working closely with Matthew and Louise to ensure the work met their aesthetic and practical expectations. The process was very thorough but did need time which meant we fell slightly behind our original schedule but the team where working very hard to achieve its goals.

Creatively this was a very exciting collaboration between Dalziel and Scullion, Scotland’s leading ecological artists and Kenny Hunter a well known Scottish sculptor. It was also the first time a project like this had ever been created anywhere in the world.

Matthew and Louise and ourselves worked closely with Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage to identify suitable and stunning sites for the benches within the Dark Skies Park and Biosphere. We looked for a local company to install the benches. Whoever was selected to install the work needed to be sensitive to both the landscape and the artistic aims and objectives of the project. In the end another artist’s company was selected to install the work, Jim Buchannan’s Land Art services. Jim has worked very closely with Louise and Matthew and Forestry Commission Scotland to install the work. He has done a very special job working in remote locations with uneven and varied ground conditions to ensure they sit beautifully in their chosen locations. The addition of Jim Buchannan has added another creative force to the existing team of nationally renowned artists. Jim is a land artist and lives locally so he has a great empathy for Dumfries and Galloway’s beautiful landscape.

The specific LEADER issue which the project responds to is “linking communities and land together”. The benches are designed to do this physically and connecting people though their senses to the landscape through a unique experience. The workshops ensure that key people know how to use the benches and through the web site ensure that more people are encouraged to come the Dark Skies Park/Biosphere and tune in to nature using the benches.
Education and Outreach

Matthew and Louise delivered workshops, as part of the Environmental Art Festival Scotland, which explored ways the benches would help people to “tune in” to nature. These workshops were very well received and proved there was a need for this type of work. The age range of those attending the workshops were mainly over 40 years old and were both male and female. The workshops were held at Cairnsmore of Fleet National Nature Reserve and also included a debate and discussion which took place in the evening were there were over 50 people attended.

We also gave a series of workshops and talks to local Rotary club and groups of environmental art students from Dumfries and Galloway College, who are all very excited about the project. The work with Students from Dumfries and Galloway College is going to be ongoing and we are developing a project for them specifically linked to the Rosnes Bench. It is important the project grows as many advocates as possible to build a groundswell of support and interest.

In Spring 2014 we plan to continue doing awareness raising workshops and workshops about how to use the benches. The idea will be to build a knowledge base among forestry workers and country rangers so they can continue to promote the use of the benches.

So far the people attending the workshops, the Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage staff, the artist community have benefitted by being involved in the project and since the benches have been installed everyone has the opportunity to experience them. It is anticipated they will attract much attention from visitors to the Dark Skies Park and the Biosphere,
the cultural sector and interest from visitors attracted to the area specifically because of the Rosnes Bench project.

Marketing

People can find out about the project by visiting the web site, www.rosnesbench.com, this site will be added to and updated over the coming months. There has also been a proposal from the artists to develop an “app” for people to download on their phones to help them seek out the benches and have a special experience. Wide Open has agreed to fundraise to help deliver this “app” for the project. It will be unique and use cutting edge technology to bring together the technological and natural world.

Other marketing activity includes promotion of the project in the local press. Dumfries and Galloway Life plan to review the project in their March issue. There has been social networking about the project on Wide Open and the Environmental Art Festival’s web site.

As well as the work already undertaken, we will also push the project in March 2014 as the Spring Tourism season approaches. It is anticipated that we will secure coverage in both local and national press and magazines. We will also work with Destination Dumfries and Galloway, Creative Scotland and Visit Scotland to promote the project nationally and internationally.

The Rosnes Bench project will also be used as a destination during the 2015 Environmental Art Festival.
Final Budget and Lessons Learned

The project was delivered on budget with the largest element of the project being design development, construction and installation. We will, as mentioned previously being raising further funding to create an app for the project and also put some further time into marketing to ensure we catch the Spring tourism season.

The artists involved in the project have been very good at working to a budget and have been careful to bring everything on budget. As with many art projects there has been a more time invested in the project by managers and artists than originally anticipated and the team worked very hard to get the project completed by the end of December 2013.

Lessons learned have been that it takes around 12 months to deliver a project of this kind from the original design being completed and funding being in place to installation.

I think we will definitely explore this way of working with a team of artists for the future. It creates a really dynamic force and allows people to achieve more by sharing their various skills.

Winter was not a good time to install the work with adverse weather conditions such as wind, rain and frost. In an ideal world the work should be installed over Spring and Summer. However this was not possible in our timeframe but we will take this into account for the future.

The work will ultimately be owned and maintained by Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland and be accessible always to the
public. Wide Open will be involved in developing projects linked to the promotion and advocacy of the Rosnes Bench project. The benches are designed to be very low maintenance and robust. However if at anytime the benches are damaged or unsafe they will be removed. They are likely to have a lifespan of at least 10 years.

This innovative project meets the LEADER issues of Economic Growth, Social Cohesion and Protection of the Environment.

The project is a unique in the world and it will attract visitors to the Dark Skies Park/ Biosphere giving people a reason to favor our Dark Skies Park and Biosphere above others in the world. It is anticipated that as the news of the Rosnes benches gets out nationally and internationally then people will make a special pilgrimage to come and see them and experience them first hand.

Awareness to the existence of the benches is rising through workshops and talks already delivered. However the work will continue and local people will be trained up to interpret the benches and draw attention to where they are in the landscape.

One of the aims of the Rosnes bench project is to help people stop and take time to contemplate our relationship with nature. The project will raises peoples’ awareness to the wonders of the natural environment through the senses of smell, sound, touch and visual senses. The Rosnes bench experience fosters an understanding and respect for the natural environment contributing to its protection.
Conclusion

We are delighted with the Rosnes Bench project and very grateful to LEADER for investing in the project, which will without doubt support and benefit the regions cultural and environmental tourism industry providing another cultural and natural experience for visitors to visit and local people to be proud of. Creatively it is a very important project for the development of the subject of environmental art and will help our region to secure the reputation as being International Home for Environmental Art.