

SENSE OF PLACE

Electric Wharf, Coventry

Location

Coventry

Status

Phase 1 completed 2004
Phase 2 completed 2005
Phase 3 completed 2006
Phase 4 due to be completed in August 2007
Bridge completed August 2006

Developer

Complex Development Projects

Design team

Architect: Larry Priest (Bryant Priest Newman)
Artists: David Patten (lead artist), Charlie Gallagher, muf, Esther Rolinson

Planning authority

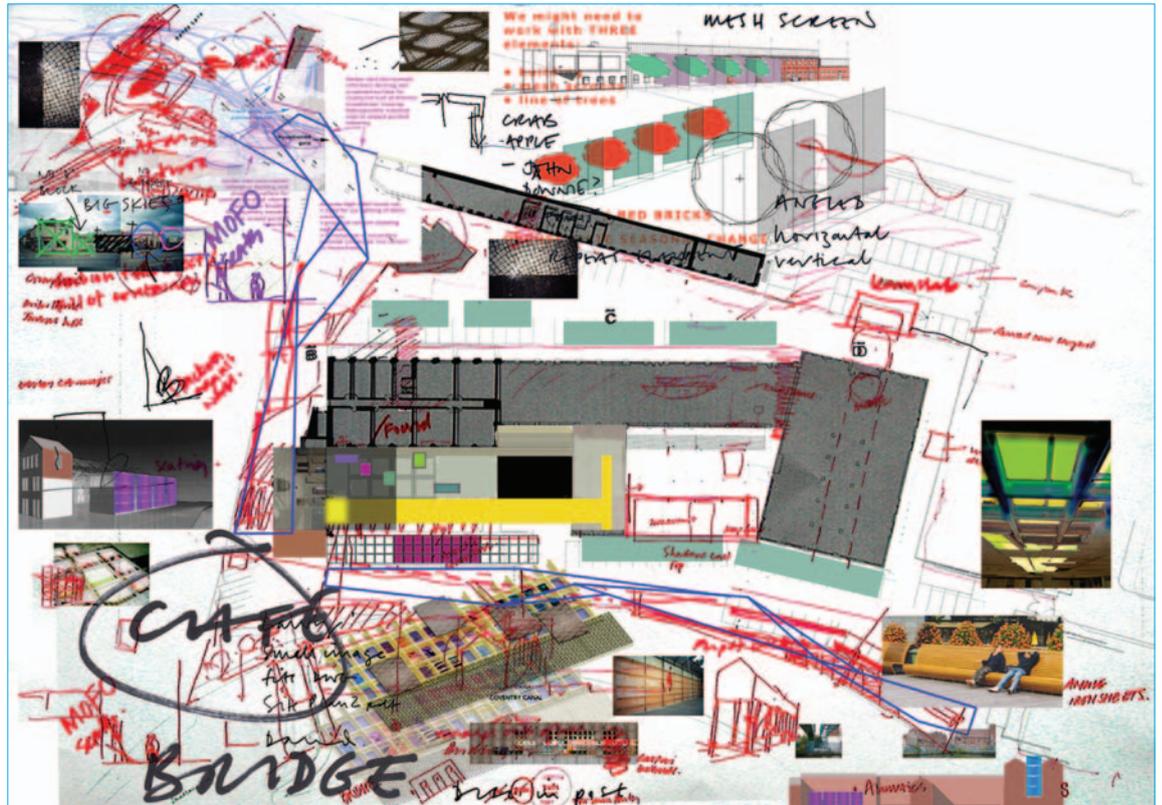
Coventry City Council

Funding body

Complex Development Projects & Bank of Scotland with public funding from Coventry City Council, EDF, Advantage West Midlands, Arts & Business and Arts Council

Contract value

£18m (approx)



Conversation Piece, drawing by lead artist David Patten and Larry Priest of Bryant Priest Newman Architects, 2003
Electric Wharf, Coventry, 2001–2006

Electric Wharf is a dynamic canalside development providing live-work apartments, low energy homes and offices created from the shell of Coventry's former Victorian power station and depot, Electric Light Works, approximately 1/3 mile north of Coventry City Centre. A major partnership initiative between developer Complex Development Projects (CDP) and Coventry City Council, the project is exemplary in showing how a commitment to creative practice and a belief in involving the arts can produce outstanding developments.

In 2000 Ian Harrabin, Director of CDP, a London-based private development company which works in partnership with government, community groups and charities to deliver urban renewal projects, approached Larry Priest of Bryant Priest Newman architects (BPN) and asked them to look at the Electric Wharf site, then owned by Powergen, with a view to being involved in shaping its future. The rich historical context of the site, its architectural heritage and the developer's objective to create a high-quality project offered the ideal framework for the inclusion of artists at an early stage of the development. This was seen as a means to engage with the local community, to "knit together separate site components; frame the site in its wider urban context and reveal or locate the extraordinary in an exceptional development," to make the project more individual in appearance and ultimately more attractive to the market.

CDP secured additional funding for the project (see factsheet overleaf) and engaged Sam Wilkinson of InSite Arts and artist David Patten to develop a public art strategy for the site. A strong working relationship

developed between the artists and architect Larry Priest, who "walked and talked the site" during 2002, developing an overall vision. Patten's input developed into a major consideration of how external spaces could be expressed. His research into the history of the site was informed by his interest in 'sense of place' which was central to his own practice as an artist.

Based on a shared sensitivity to the Electric Wharf site and personal rapport, the collaboration between architect and artist and their continuing dialogue have been some of the most positive and unique aspects of the project. Larry Priest felt that Patten understood 'the bigger picture' and took a holistic view of the site. Harrabin regarded David Patten as 'unique' as an artist in terms of his knowledge and experience of the building process.



Electric Wharf site before development started

ArtefactProjects

Jif
partnerships



Together Harrabin and Patten wrote a 'set of rules', or 'a way of thinking', for the site referred to as *The Electric Wharf Design Statement*. In 2001, David Patten was appointed lead-artist on the project and at the start of 2002, muf and Esther Rolinson were selected from a short-list of artists to develop ideas and realise a range of temporary and permanent works for the development. Charlie Gallagher was appointed to document the project through photography.

Gallagher's observation and research became a crucial part of the design process, and the high quality and diverse range of images he created became a valuable resource for the project. During 2001 and 2003 muf, an interdisciplinary practice who specialise in urban regeneration projects, led on the community link programme. Work created included a collage made by the school children; eco-wallpaper for the marketing suite; a planted verge; and an evening cruise with performances and installations and fireworks was organised. Esther Rolinson's work, who specialises in the use of light, culminated in a design for a permanent large scale work, 'Trace Elements', sited at the entrance to Electric Wharf. The final work comprised hundreds of metres of LED strips inset into railway sleepers that are programmed to create a wave like motion of light at the entrance of Electric Wharf. muf engaged in an early dialogue with the design team developing ideas for the pedestrian bridge linking Electric Wharf to the city (later realised by engineers/designers Price & Myers), and developed initial schemes and concepts for the design of the car parks.

For Electric Wharf, an artists-led approach and a firm commitment to the involvement of artists has produced outstanding results and a development of exemplary quality. But beyond the quality of design and a sense of place, as Ian Harrabin from CDP points out, the involvement of artists can add value and increase benefits in a subtle way when working on a commercial project such as Electric Wharf, especially when the economy is slow. Much of the success of the scheme, Harrabin argues, was due to David Patten's influence and the art contribution made to all areas of the development.

www.electricwharf.com

Sources

Frances Lord, Electric Wharf case study for Public Art Online, (www.publicartonline.org.uk/case/electric_wharf/index.php); Sam Wilkinson and David Patten, "Electric Light Works Public Art Strategy" (www.publicartonline.org.uk/case/electric_wharf/pastrategy.php)



Artist's impressions of Electric Wharf development



Exterior of Turbine Hall after completion



'Trace Elements' – Esther Rolinson's light installation at Electric Wharf



Temporary garden design by muf



Exterior of Turbine Hall after completion

Developer

Complex Development Projects
89 Turnmill Street, London
EC1M 5QU
T: 020 7490 5387
F: 020 7608 1855

Architects

Bryant Priest Newman
3 Mary Street, Birmingham B3 1UD
T: 0121 233 1818
F: 0121 233 11188

Artists

David Patten (lead artist)

Charlie Gallagher

muf

Esther Rolinson

Project Consultant (Arts)

Sam Wilkinson

Planning Authority

Coventry City Council
Council House, Earl Street
Coventry CV1 5RR
T: 024 7683 3333
www.coventry.gov.uk

Public Funding Bodies

ERDF (European Regional Development Fund for England)
Department for Communities & Local Government
Eland House, Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
www.erdf.odpm.gov.uk

Advantage West Midlands
3 Priestley Wharf, Holt Street
Aston Science Park
Birmingham B7 4BN
T: 0121 380 3500
F: 0121 380 3501
www.advantagewm.co.uk

Coventry City Council
Council House, Earl Street
Coventry CV1 5RR
T: 024 7683 3333
www.coventry.gov.uk

Arts & Business
Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street
Butler's Wharf, London SE1 2NY
T: 020 7378 8143
F: 020 7407 7527
www.aandb.org.uk

Arts Council England (Regional Arts Lottery Programme and Grants for the Arts), 14 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 3NQ
T: 0845 300 6200

Case studies compiled by Joseph Kohlmaier for Artefact Projects