



# Brierley Hillness

Approaches to Community Engagement and Lessons Learnt



Arts-based workshops

Performance events

Talks and interviews

*The Brierley Hillness Case Study*

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**Photographic images on front cover  
(top to bottom):**

*The Brierley Hill Project MC-ing  
performance at Artspace 2011.*

Arts & Crafts workshop with Homestart  
at Artspace 2011.

Mural Painting workshop at Artspace  
2011.

*Family Arts & Crafts activity at Artspace  
2011.*

African Drumming workshop at  
Hawbush Community Gardens 2011.

*Arts, Crafts and Reminiscence  
workshop with AgeUK in Netherton  
2011.*

Dudley Performing Arts Production at  
Brierley Hill Civic Hall 2011.

**The concept of this project is inspired by  
ARC's project called "Hullness"**

[www.arc-online.co.uk/hullness](http://www.arc-online.co.uk/hullness)

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## Brierley Hill: Approaches to Community Engagement and Lessons Learnt

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Edited and designed by Suzanne Carter

Thank you to everyone who has contributed  
their creativity, talent, images, memories,  
thoughts and time to the *Brierley Hillness*  
community arts and heritage project.

Special thanks to Audiences Central for running the  
photographic competition through ArtsNation.

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# Introduction

Written by Suzanne Carter

This document has been written to share the methodology used and lessons learnt during the *Brierley Hillness* Project and accompanies the on-line toolkit and project archive at [www.brierleyhillnesstoolkit.wordpress.com](http://www.brierleyhillnesstoolkit.wordpress.com).

This Community Engagement toolkit is based on the project case study and is aimed at professionals working in regeneration or town planning, but may be useful for anyone looking to engage and consult with communities using arts and heritage.

We hope that the lessons we have learnt through this project will enthuse and support other professionals working in regeneration areas to approach consultation in a creative way – the benefit of which is a well-articulated, imaginative and inspiring response.

## Project Overview

*Brierley Hillness* was a community arts and heritage project with two main aims. The first was to give a greater opportunity for local people in Brierley Hill to help shape the future of the town's design by contributing their thoughts, ideas and creativity about what makes the town distinctive and special.

Through understanding which historic places, spaces and architecture in the town are unique and important to communities this project aimed to capture the 'spirit' of Brierley Hill; to help developers, urban designers and planners understand what 'Brierley Hillness' is – through the eyes of local people - and take this into consideration when planning future developments within the town.

To influence local decision making about design and planning issues we produced a publication called *Understanding Brierley Hill*. This is a collection of community responses gathered during the project. It features original creative writing, audio transcripts of oral history, photographs and artwork. We also present statistics gathered through survey work, and the opinions of people who have associations with the town.

Alongside this we have also produced a short film called *My Brierley Hill* which features interviews with people who live, work or shop in Brierley Hill. In the film local people express the way they feel about the town today and make suggestions on how it could be improved; they share their aspirations for the town's future.

**Both of these outputs were submitted to Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council's Planning Team during the public consultation on the Urban Design Supplementary Planning Document for the new Brierley Hill town centre in 2011.**

***Understanding Brierley Hill* has also been requested by the artist commissioned to produce a sculpture for the Stourbridge Art and Design Centre opening in Brierley Hill in 2011, and some of the content is being used to inspire the Round Oak Memorial Sculpture design by the Borough Artist.**

The project will live on through the [www.brierleyhillnesstoolkit.wordpress.com](http://www.brierleyhillnesstoolkit.wordpress.com) blog and the contributions made by local people will provide evidence to inspire and influence the regeneration process, cultural learning and future arts and heritage projects in the town. We also hope it is a lively space where local people can continue to voice their thoughts about the town and share their creative work and memories about Brierley Hill.

The second main aim of the *Brierley Hillness* project was to demonstrate that using creativity and heritage as a starting point you can consult with people of all ages about where they live; helping them to express how they feel about the area, and motivating them to have a say in its future.

Through arts-based workshops, reminiscence sessions, events, and talking to people on the streets, the communities who live in and visit Brierley Hill were invited to reflect on the past, talk about the present and share their aspirations for the future of the town.

Over 1000 local people of all ages contributed in some way to our understanding of *Brierley Hillness*; 361 people were *directly engaged* as participants; **70% of these participated in a creative learning activity**. 380 people attended events and a further 274 people took part in survey work, giving their thoughts and opinions about the town, with a focus on their perceptions towards the historic environment.

## A Partnership Project

The *Brierley Hillness* project ran from January to June 2011. It was led by the English Heritage Outreach Team in partnership with Dudley Arts Council, Artspace Brierley Hill, Dudley Performing Arts, Brierley Hill Community Forum, the Adult and Community Learning Service at Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council and in collaboration with Audiences Central and the Public Art Unit at DMBC.





## Contents

During the *Brierley Hillness* project we used nine different artistic mediums or participatory approaches to engage with a broad spectrum of local people – all designed to get them talking about Brierley Hill.

Each chapter focuses on a different approach. Under each heading we indicate the groups we worked with. In chapters 10 and 11 we provide a summary of participation and a budget breakdown.

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Visit [www.brierleyhillnesstoolkit.wordpress.com](http://www.brierleyhillnesstoolkit.wordpress.com) for video footage, audio and downloadable resources to accompany this publication.





# Approach One: Community Mural

*Engaging with people of all ages*

Written by Suzanne Carter

## Methodology

The mural was housed in Artspace, an empty shop unit on temporary lease to Dudley Arts Council in partnership with the Adult and Community Learning Service at Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council.

The mural was painted on four wooden ply boards, each 4 x 6 ft (12ml deep), joined to batons and drilled into the shop walls.

The artist's brief was to work with members of the community to paint a mural which captured the 'spirit' of Brierley Hill – to include representations of the places, spaces and architecture within the town, and associated memories suggested by local people to create a piece of art which reflected what is distinctive, special and unique about Brierley Hill.

To engage in the theme of *Brierley Hillness* artist DJ first researched the history of the town and took pictures of buildings and landmarks which held historical significance.

Instead of early participants being faced with a blank wall, DJ painted some of the iconic building outlines to get the mural started. The mural would naturally evolve as people came forward with further suggestions for the content.

It was challenging at first to find out what participants thought should go on the mural to capture the 'spirit' of the town – but after a few weeks and many landmarks appearing, they began to tell DJ what they thought was missing.



“Once they have started to paint it has a great calming and relaxing effect which opens people up and they can discover things about themselves and their community that they were previously unaware of.”

*DJ, mural artist*



Other local people who were not involved in painting, also made suggestions about what should feature. Their comments were fed through to DJ and he was sent photos. Members of Dudley MIND, who were regular visitors to Artspace, were asked to take photos of some of the missing places mentioned.

“It has helped me take more of an interest in the surrounding areas where I live and gain more knowledge of the history of Brierley Hill.”

*Participant*

DJ demonstrated techniques and helped mix colours with each individual. Painters of all abilities could get involved in this type of ‘layered’ mural as there were plenty of blocks of colour and background textures to paint throughout. Others preferred to work on detail.

Images and photographs were stuck on the mural for people to refer to.

Over 50 painters had a go at painting with DJ over fifteen workshops, ages ranging from 12 to over 65.

“I enjoyed being part of something worthwhile. Watching the mural developing each week gave me a real sense of achievement. It made me feel useful again and had something still to give.”

*Participant*

The workshops ran on Tuesdays between January and April 2011. We set aside Tuesdays for painting the mural, as Tuesdays are traditionally one of the busier days in the town. Artspace already ran workshops on Saturdays. However, we did not attract many painters on these days. We also ran a workshop on a Saturday, a Tuesday evening and during the school holidays. These additional times brought in greater numbers of painters and a wider variety of participants.

Programming workshops at a variety of times would have yielded greater numbers to the mural painting project. However, two ladies came to nearly every workshop, and a group from Dudley MIND joined us every two weeks. For the regulars, small numbers meant they were able to contribute more, and benefit from the opportunity.

“It has given me confidence to venture on an art course, which I keep meaning to do but keep putting off. However, I am booking a course in September at Halesowen College of Art.”

*Participant*

DJ spent a day at the end adding final details and a coat of varnish for weatherproofing.

The mural will have a permanent home in Brierley Hill Library from August 2011.



## Mural Development - Stage by Stage



### Workshop One: the mural begins!

Blocks of colour laid down by artist DJ to form a sky line, using iconic buildings in the town as a starting point.



### Workshop Two: details begin to emerge.

Visible is former Dudley College/public library, Walter Smith's butchers, St Mary's (later removed), Market Hall and Chapel Street Estate.



### Workshop Three: additional board added on left!

As mural is to be used as backdrop to *Brierley Hillness* theatre production, locations and buildings featured in script need to be added. Old industrial building also added (green, later removed).



### Workshop Four: more features added.

These include the outline of the war memorial and St Michael's Church.



Dudley MIND took photos of local landmarks to include in the mural.



**Workshop Five: detailing and new features.** Nine Locks Canal, the Red Lion pub sign (features in theatre script) and high street shops appear.





**A slogan is added and mural moved to Brierley Hill Civic Hall.**

The mural is used in a Dudley Performing Arts Production “One Boy. One Town. One Big Idea!” featuring Buzz Youth Theatre and four local primary schools. The script is based on historical research and local people’s thoughts on *Brierley Hillness*.



**Workshops Six & Seven: back on the wall – working towards the final piece.**

The Soldier is repositioned. St Mary’s is removed to allow for the new Stourbridge College building. High Street shops taking shape.



**Workshops Eight, Nine & Ten: more blocks of colour.**

Glow of furnaces added after talking to former workers at Round Oak Steel Works. Old cinema added (at suggestion of local history group), Briar Rose sculpture outline appears.



**Workshops Eleven, Twelve & Thirteen: details added, new features.**

Features include the water fountain, the Marsh & Baxter’s pig (local history group suggestion), the Merry Hill sign and Round Oak’s five chimneys which used to dominate the skyline.



Image of Round Oak five chimney stacks sent by John Timmins

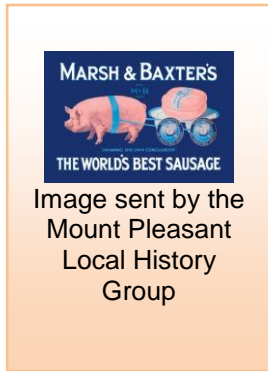


Image sent by the Mount Pleasant Local History Group

“It is a project that brings people together rather than everyone working on individual projects – everybody has a role in the end product.”

*Group leader, Dudley MIND*



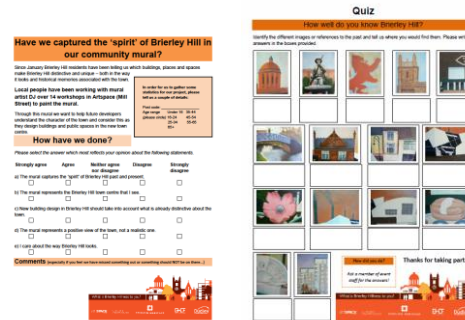


### Workshops Fourteen & Fifteen: fine detailing and last addition.

The Marsh's pig starts to draw its own conclusion! (slogan which features on promotional poster - see previous page).

“Hopefully it will give people a new way of looking at the buildings of Brierley Hill, both old and new.”

*Participant*



Quiz and questionnaire about the mural

## Did we capture the spirit of Brierley Hill in the mural?

The mural was displayed inside the Concord Market on a Saturday afternoon where we asked people what they thought.

90% of people who responded agreed that the mural captured the ‘spirit’ of the town.

However, 73% of these people also thought the mural represented a *positive* view of the town, rather than a realistic one.

Source: 33 self-completion questionnaires



Inside Concord Market, Brierley Hill 7 May 2011

## Lessons Learnt

Vary the times and days of workshops in order to engage with a wider variety of participants. Programme more family activities in school holidays.

Tie in the mural painting workshops with a wider adult learning programme of activities, instead of promoting them under a separate project.

Do more initial research with the local community about what should feature on the mural before starting; to avoid ‘leading’ the content and then seeking endorsement. The steer from the community was very useful when people contributed.



# Approach Two: Creative Writing

*Engaging with young people and older people*

Written by Suzanne Carter

Contributors: Emma Purshouse & Brendan Hawthorne

Members of two community organisations joined us to explore the theme of *Brierley Hillness* through creative writing workshops.

The Brierley Hill Civic Society contributed memories, thoughts and poetic descriptions about Brierley Hill past, present and future in a two-hour workshop. These ideas were forged into a poem by Brendan Hawthorne, who later worked with children from Holly Hall Secondary School (aged 11-12 years) to create a performance piece.

Emma Purshouse ran two, two-hour writing workshops with young people and staff at The Brierley Hill Project. A selection of their work was then performed by many of the participants at an evening event at Artspace.

## Methodology 1 – Collective Poem

Brierley Hill Civic Society were asked to come to the workshop prepared to share with the group one of the following:

- A story or fact about a Brierley Hill building, place or space that is important to them
- Pictures of buildings which make Brierley Hill special
- Newspaper cuttings about things that make Brierley Hill distinctive
- A completed sentence “Brierley Hillness is...”





Brendan began the workshop reading some of his own poems about industrial towns to inspire and encourage the group.

Armed with flipchart paper the group were split into three smaller groups to focus on Brierley Hill past, present and future and asked to draw up a list of the qualities, the pitfalls, traditions and hopes of the town.

The groups fed back their thoughts, ideas and some poetic verse they had written.

Brendan took away the group's notes and forged a poem based on ideas generated in the workshop. He used many of the exact words in the poem, which was then performed to the group at a separate occasion.

The poem was later turned into a performance piece working with children from a secondary school in Dudley (see methodology 3).

### **Extract from Brierley Hillness**

I was once a real town  
with an urban council  
art school and library  
Gave opportunities for  
education  
in a working class  
community  
I entertained at the Danilo  
A silver screen  
flicker for the population  
A touch of glamour-to-go  
There was of course  
Marsh and Baxter's  
and the Piggy Bank  
where statistics squealed  
five thousand porkers  
before nine o'clock  
Before a pint was sunk

“The medium of poetry allows people to share their views or information concisely and without having to have much experience of the art form. It embraces all backgrounds and academic abilities and is therefore, in my mind, an all-embracing arts medium”.

*Workshop leader*

## **Lessons Learnt**

Working with an established group can make it easier to run a one-off workshop over a short space of time. There was no need to use ice-breaker strategies as individuals were focussed and comfortable sharing their ideas.

There is a limit to what you can achieve in a two-hour writing workshop; there was not enough time for participants to write their own poetry. Further workshops would enable participants to learn writing techniques and to be more creative.

The poem that Brendan forged was very well received by the group as it maintained their original ideas, their own words and was a concrete and meaningful output from the workshop.





## Methodology 2 – Spoken Word, MC-ing and Song Writing

Emma Purshouse delivered two creative writing workshops at The Brierley Hill Project. She encouraged the participants to engage using their preferred style of self expression; MC-ing, poetry and song.

Over the two sessions seven people made contributions. Some contributions were purely verbal and some contributed written and oral work. The age range of participants was 21 upwards.



Emma's workshops involved setting up a number of bite-sized activities for people to participate in.

One of these was for individuals to write single words or sentences on post-it notes. These were then combined into a group poem - an instant poem that people could hear straight away.



**Visual Poem –  
messages in rhyme  
stuck onto placards.  
Each placard is a  
different person  
speaking.**

From God we need a gift

Let's be honest  
We need a face lift

Put some spark  
Into the parks

Leave it the same  
I'd still complain

Brierley Hill  
A proper dive  
No one gets  
Outta here alive

Don't take my library  
I want books for free

Gimme some clubs  
Where I can practice me  
dubz!

Brierley Hill  
I think it's great  
I'm not sure  
It's such a state

I'm still stacking Pasta  
But hopefully soon  
We'll have George  
At Asda

Brierley Hill  
Enter at your will.

Emma had pre-prepared artwork that post-it notes could be stuck on to which created instant visuals for the session.

Another exercise involved drawing up a list of buildings in Brierley Hill – the good, the bad and the ugly. This group exercise was used as a starting point for writing creative pieces in the voice of various buildings, such as the old market café and police station.

The idea of using different activities was to enable people to drop in and out of the session and contribute something, or stay for the whole session and develop longer pieces of work.



We had provided Emma with some key questions that we were seeking to answer during the *Brierley Hillness* project. Many of the questions lent themselves to creative writing activities and included:

- If Brierley Hill could talk, what would it say to future developers?
- Which buildings give people who live here a ‘sense of place’?
- What particular spaces make people think “I’m in Brierley Hill”?
- Are there words that can be used to describe the ‘spirit’ of the town?

Instead of bombarding participants with questions, activities were set up which might inadvertently answer a number of the questions.

***A Riddle... which building am I?***

*I can greet you with a grin*

*Or I can swallow you whole.*

*I can make you confident*

*Or leave you desperate.*

*My question is why have you come through my door?*

*Answer:- The Police Station*

“For me, they have been really creative, really enjoyable, really opened up a lot of doors within my mind... there is just so much talent that comes in and out these doors that we just need someone like Emma P... with the right tools to bring it out of your mind”.

*Workshop participant*

During the workshops Emma also worked with the group on some performance skills as many of the group were taking part in a sharing of work at Artspace; a venue which was away from the centre and therefore out of their comfort zone.

“The event was attended by people who were from outside of the centre and I think this also gave the group confidence and reinforced the idea that their words were being heard”.

*Workshop leader*



Members and volunteers performing in their preferred styles; Mc-ing, poetry and song.

## Lessons Learnt

Offering bite-sized activities enables people to drop in and out of a session. This allows for attention spans and people who might feel uncomfortable if they had to stay for a long period in the same space. If there are different group members at each workshop, it means everyone is able to take part and contribute.

Many of the participants responded easily to questions about *Brierley Hillness*. However, in initial conversations some were falling into the trap of either coming up with stereotypical answers or answers that they felt were wanted. The creative activities helped people bypass these stock responses and come up with responses which were more thoughtful and relevant to them.

Pitching the idea of taking part in a creative writing workshop can be challenging as many people might associate writing with school. It is crucial that you have the support of the people who run the centres, youth clubs and groups who can encourage people to come along to the sessions.

## Methodology 3 – Poem to Performance Piece

The Civic Society's *Brierley Hillness* poem which was forged by Brendan Hawthorne was later turned into a performance piece. Brendan worked with a group of eleven children (aged 11-12) from Holly Hall Secondary School in Dudley to create a live performance for the project finale event.



The poem is naturally in three parts; representing the past, present and future. An adult was selected to read the 'past', two children to read the 'present' and a chorus of children to read the 'future'. The performance was to a simple backdrop of projected images of the town; a black and white picture of the old post office (which is referenced in the poem), a recent picture of some High Street shops and the town's newest building – Stourbridge Art and Design College – the future.

Working with Brendan over three half-day workshops, the children generated their own ideas about movements, gestures and costumes to bring this poem alive and present it to the audience. They were also taught some performance techniques.

"Brendan and the project have brought living poetry into our classrooms and given the pupils a real opportunity to work with a professional in celebrating their community. It is delightful to hear young voices cataloguing the present and looking forward to the future."

*Headteacher, Holly Hall School*

## Lessons Learnt

Creative work produced with one group can then be used to inspire another. In our case a poem forged out of a creative writing workshop with the Civic Society led to working with a group of children at a school who turned it into a performance piece. They were allowed to shape their own interpretation. This piece was then filmed and shared with a wider audience to inspire others. Where will it go next? Not limiting a piece of work to its original brief can create multi-media and community wide opportunities to participate.

Challenges can arise when information about the project is refracted through third parties, rather than working directly with those responsible for delivery. It is important that a clear brief is written and communicated to avoid misunderstandings and different expectations.





## Approach Three: Drama and Dance

*Engaging with children, young people and older people*

Written by Suzanne Carter  
Contributor: Rachel Sharpe

Two drama productions were created as part of the *Brierley Hillness* project, focusing on Brierley Hill past, present and future. “One Boy. One Town. One Big Idea!” was a Dudley Performing Arts dance and physical theatre production, involving Buzz Youth Theatre and 110 children from four local primary schools. It was performed at the Civic Hall in Brierley Hill to an audience of almost 200 people.

The second is a drama piece inspired by street interviews filmed during 2011 as part of the *Brierley Hillness* project. Mike Tinsley worked with Age UK’s drama group, based at Merry Hill, who wrote the piece, which was performed outside the shopping centre and filmed.

### Methodology – “One Boy. One Town. One Big Idea!” Script Development

Written by Rachel Sharpe

From the initial planning discussions, it was always envisaged that the production should be an honest reflection and celebration of the people of Brierley Hill. Charting the ever-changing, and at points contentious, built environment which houses a diverse, proud and passionate community.

Research began with books written on the local area; in particular the books of Ned Williams were useful, giving a pictorial and anecdotal record of the town’s history. Research continued through face to face interviews with local people, in particular community leaders. This information was then used to form the basis of the devising process.

Buzz Theatre Company, a local youth theatre group,



“A true representation of what Brierley Hill was all about”.

*Audience member*



had previous experience of working on cultural heritage projects which included dance and drama. The group, aged 14 – 25, either lived locally in Brierley Hill or the surrounding area.

At the start of the devising and rehearsal process, all performers were asked to take a walk through Brierley Hill High Street, taking note of buildings they did and didn't like, explaining why. This information was then mapped through an image theatre exercise, physically creating buildings and our feelings toward them through theatre. As an extension of this task, images were brought to life through instant improvisation, allowing people, statues and sometimes even buildings to speak; it appeared everyone had an opinion about how the town should look!

Through these initial workshops core and peripheral characters were built, and interesting situations forged. For example, Stan the Statue, who in reality overlooks the Chapel Street flats became a focal character in scene four, a scene entitled 'George's Personal War'. Performers were encouraged to interview members of their family and friends; to gain a wider understanding of the community's feelings toward the built environment.



To develop a framework for the performance which reflected important milestones in the town's history, significant buildings were selected which had an historic relevance to making or changing the face of the town's built environment. Buildings such as Marsh & Baxter's factory, and the Round Oak Steel Works, which had an almost iconic status in the hearts and minds of the town's residents, had to be featured within the plot.

"Enjoyed today's show. All true about Round Oak."

*Audience member*



Improvisations began to focus on the impact of the life and closure of such buildings and the need for an 'Everyman' character began to emerge; someone who could reflect the changing environment through firsthand experience. Shakespeare's 'Seven Ages of Man' offered a creative framework to watch the life of one resident growing and living in Brierley Hill.

These initial workshops and devising sessions were used as the basis for the script "One Boy. One Town. One Big Idea!" which was written and directed by Rachel Sharpe from Dudley Performing Arts.

Throughout the play, the audience meet George at six important stages in his life, inspired by six of the seven ages of man. Within each stage we meet George in different buildings in Brierley Hill.

Each stage reflects a different aspect of George's growth within the town. Ending with his plea, the central theme of our narrative; that celebrating and cataloguing the past is important, but you must also be an active part of the town's future. This is the big idea alluded to in the title – becoming an active planner of the future for your town.

In between the scenes on stage performed by Buzz Youth Theatre, children performed contemporary dance pieces, inspired by elements of the story. The following section describes the methodology used working with schools.

The community mural being painted at Artspace at the time of the performance was used as a stage backdrop. The content of the script also influenced some of the buildings and places featured on the mural.



Mural after five painting workshops.



Completed mural (15 workshops).

Audience reactions to the performance were filmed and feedback forms given to all audience members.

“Your last scene commented on new buildings and not to dwell on the old. We have some lovely old buildings that need preserving and some bringing into the 21st century. It is not good building new places when we could update some of the old ones. To revamp and keep it clean and looked after.”

*Audience Member*

“A real pleasure to see all the young people involved, actively thinking about the history but I liked the twist at the end about the future as it's really, really easy to sit back in an area like this which is so rich in cultural history, and so rich in recent history and turbulence, and think 'oh well let's forget about it', but that lovely note of optimism at the end which is about moving on reflects the resilience and the sense of humour that this area has.”

*Audience Member*





Questions asked included (with a selection of answers) :

1. Do you think the new buildings fit in with the old ones in Brierley Hill?
2. Should old buildings be modernised, preserved as they are or knocked down/demolished?
3. What is the most important in the design of a new building?
4. Do local people have a say in the development of buildings in Brierley Hill?
5. Do you consider Brierley Hill to be part of Merry Hill?

65% of primary school children said Brierley Hill's old buildings should be preserved as they are.

26% of primary school children said Brierley Hill's old buildings should be modernised.

*74 children surveyed from four local primary schools*

"I would like Brierley Hill to be brought back to a town and not just a few shops. It is mainly food takeaways and it has lost its character. I have lived there all my life and it's really sad to see the deterioration of it. It has been made worse by the new by-pass".

*Parent of child attending Withymoore*

The dance artists shared with the children the initial research by Scriptwriter and Director Rachel Sharpe and built on this, feeding the children's own research into their five minute dance piece.

Both pieces had pre-planned movement ideas and imagery, some included props. Each piece also had creative aspects where the children devised movement themselves.

Two classes learnt a combined piece which was performed with another school. On performance day, the children rehearsed with Buzz Youth Theatre and each other for the first time. All cast and dancers learnt the finale for the first time.

100% of children who responded to the post-performance evaluation said that taking part in the project has helped them learn about the history and heritage of Brierley Hill.

*Source: 17 self-completion questionnaires*

68% of audience members who responded agreed that the performance had increased their knowledge of the history and heritage of Brierley Hill.

*Source: 74 audience self-completion questionnaires*



## Lessons Learnt

Having a questionnaire sent home for children to complete with their parents was an excellent tool to widen the net of people we consulted with. However, the questionnaire asked different questions than other survey work being carried out during the *Brierley Hillness* project. A core set of questions for everyone taking part in any research or survey would have strengthened the statistical analysis. We could have improved this by the project partners agreeing the questions at the very beginning of the project.

The children performed on the floor in front of the stage at the Civic Hall due to space and logistical management of the production. The only negative feedback from the audience in the stalls was they found it difficult to see the children perform. This would need to be considered at any future performance at this venue working with small children.

The performance was on the last day before half term and evaluation forms for children were given out at the last minute on the day to teachers. As many children left with their parents and didn't return to school for over a week, there was a low response rate. Preparing teachers in advance would have enabled feedback forms to be sent home ready for completion.

## Methodology – “Brierley Hillness” Script Development

We had filmed twenty five street interviews with local shoppers, residents and traders for another part of the *Brierley Hillness* project (see Approach Nine: Interviewing in the Streets).

Transcriptions of these interviews were provided to Age UK's weekly drama group, based at the Merry Hill Shopping Centre. Over five one-hour workshops, and with the support of local writer and musician Mike Tinsley, Age UK's drama group scripted a fifteen minute drama piece, inspired by the real life voices of local people.

The transcripts were used as a starting point for discussion about Brierley Hill, and members of the drama group each contributed their own perspective, experiences and opinions of the town. The group decided which comments made during the interviews would feature in their creative piece.



The scene was set in a bus stop to create a space where people of different backgrounds and interests would naturally meet. Each member developed their own character and lines in the play. Fran Cartwright and Carol Duke led the writing of the overall script, ensuring that comments made during the street interviews were woven into the dialogue.



### **“Brierley Hilliness”**

#### **Extract from poem to close the scene**

F: “So let us paint a picture of how we’d like to see a future Brierley Hilliness and how it soon could be...”

D: An orderly and ordered place

J: Shows ladies fashion fair

M: Keen busy markets decked with flowers

E: and tea shops on the square...”

The piece was filmed outside the shopping centre in a mock up of a bus stop to screen at the *Brierley Hilliness* project finale event.

## **Lessons Learnt**

It is important to be flexible. We originally brought the idea to the group of creating a live performance piece for the project finale event. However, the group didn’t feel able to commit to this fixed date, and some members were unable to attend all the weekly sessions. We offered to film the performance instead and screen this at the finale event. This actually gives the work longevity as a wider audience will see the performance through a presence on the web.

As the majority of the group were not from Brierley Hill, but surrounding areas, and some had not been to the town for years, the film transcripts of real interviews was an excellent starting point for script development and for group discussions. It also enabled us to give a voice for the shoppers, residents and traders through dramatic expression.

From a writing point of view, it was challenging to balance the creative expression and character development of members of the group and keep to the purpose of the film; which was to incorporate comments and ideas expressed in the street interviews. A clear brief about the purpose of the film and final audience is essential.



## Approach Four: Music

*Engaging with children and inspiring musical compositions*

Written by Suzanne Carter

During the project we were keen to demonstrate that you could use a wide range of creative medium to get people talking about where they live and their aspirations for the future of their town. We thought a participatory music activity would work especially well with children. We ran two African drumming workshops with children aged between seven and fourteen.

A musical composition was also created, inspired by sounds of Brierley Hill. It used soundscape recordings of the town as a background track.

### Methodology – African Drumming Workshop

The first of two workshops, led by Mike Tinsley, was run with members of The Brierley Hill Project's after-school club, involving children whose ages ranged from seven to twelve.

The participants had fun learning rhythms and songs using West African *djembe* drums. However, as this was the first time that the children had been to Artspace and it was at the end of the school day, it was not the right opportunity to engage the group in talking about the town. So we tested the approach with a different group of slightly older children, and in a different environment.



The second workshop involved a group of ten to fourteen year olds from Hawbush. It was run outside on a sunny day at Hawbush Community Gardens.

The main focus of the workshop, and the 'hook' to involvement, was experiencing the African drums and learning some drumming techniques. The first hour concentrated entirely on this.



In the second hour we started discussions about Brierley Hill.

First, we asked the children to think about words that they would use to describe Brierley Hill. There was a mixture of positive and negative comments.

They then took turns drumming a rhythm, saying their word and explaining their reasons for choosing it. The children's responses were mainly about their own immediate area and experiences; negative comments focused on the lack of playground facilities, vandalism and litter. Positive comments were related to family and friends.

The children had to be prompted to consider buildings and the contribution they make to the area. The children naturally considered the use of buildings, rather than the way they look, when talking about the High Street and Merry Hill.

### Words chosen to describe the town today

- Awful
- Dirty
- Beautiful
- Busy
- Rubbish
- Not bad
- A death trap
- Crime
- Cigarettes
- Drunken people
- Fantastic
- Messy



After a brief return to drumming, and learning an African song, the children were then asked to think about the future, in context with regeneration; new buildings, jobs, places to meet. In ten years time when you are in your twenties, how would you like Brierley Hill to look? What would you like to be able to say about your town?

The children were asked to write a word or sentence on a post-it note and stick it on their drum. Most children used adjectives to describe feelings – happy, cheerful, hopeful - in relation to their friends and family. A few thought about change, about playground facilities and the town being cleaner. One boy said he wanted to feel 'proud' of his town.

Mike then walked around the group, singing the tune to the African song they had just learnt, but with the words changed to "Ten years time, Brierley Hill, Brierley Hill..." ). The children took turns to speak or sing back their word or sentence and explain why they had chosen it. We were aiming to produce a group song in which they expressed their aspirations for the future to a steady drum beat.

"The ideas and feelings from the group were quite strong and though most seemed happy with the area where they lived they seemed keen to discuss how to instigate improvements".

*Workshop leader*



## Lessons Learnt

Familiar surroundings and the timing of workshops are important when working with participants, especially young children. For us, the workshop which ran at the children's own local venue, around lunchtime during the school holidays worked much better than the workshop at the end of a school day, in a new, unfamiliar environment.

Some pre-workshop preparation would have added more focus to the discussions and helped the children to think about the buildings of Brierley Hill before they came. The children would have felt more equipped to articulate what they think about their town and ways it could be improved.

We attempted to create a group song at the end of the workshop. Because we were trying to capture what the children said on audio – to use as part of the consultation work we were doing in the wider project – Mike moved around the group members and everyone waited to make their contribution. This meant that the drumming focus was lost, along with a steady drum beat and some of the enthusiasm. This collective response song would have worked better if the drumming and singing had been led by Mike from a stationary position and children prompted to speak by another facilitator.

## Methodology – *Brierley Hillness* Inspired Compositions: Using Soundscape

Musician Pete Williams went into the town and recorded ambient sounds of Brierley Hill during a *Brierley Hillness* workshop. These included: market, street, cafe, Merry Hill mall, canal, the water locks and weir; and inside TXMax, KFC and the library. Artspace coordinator and musician Ed Cartwright then used a selection of these



audio sounds to create a background track for his Brierley Hill-inspired saxophone composition entitled *Faggotsnpeas*.

You can listen to the track at [www.brierleyhillnesstoolkit.wordpress.com](http://www.brierleyhillnesstoolkit.wordpress.com)

*Musical compositions about Brierley Hill were also written by members of the Brierley Hill Project as a result of the creative writing workshops (see Approach Two: Creative Writing).*



## Approach Five: Reminiscence

### *Engaging with older people*

Written by Suzanne Carter

During the project we ran both formal and informal reminiscence sessions at Artspace. The informal 'drop-ins' were more a chat over a cuppa, although we did record the conversations where possible to refer back to.

We also ran some pre-booked formal oral history sessions, specifically with ex-workers of the Round Oak Steel Works, to support an exhibition and memorial sculpture project that was running at the same time.

They were two very different approaches and outcomes.

### Methodology – Drop-in at Artspace

Tuesdays were *Brierley Hillness* days at Artspace and we asked people to drop in with their memories and stories about what makes Brierley Hill distinctive and unique.

In the first few weeks we met most of the people who wanted to share their memories and knowledge of the area. These people were mainly involved with local history groups. After a *Remembering Round Oak* evening event some former workers at the steelworks also brought in photos and stories. A tip off from a grandson led us to invite a participant to Artspace to talk about Brierley Hill's historic fire brickwork industry.



Dennis Andrews uses an old map to illustrate where important events in Brierley Hill history happened, including the rail disaster and war time bombs dropping.

People contributed newspaper cuttings, internet research, lists of former industrial businesses, old family and work photos, and images of types of industrial machinery.

A special “meet the author” event, featuring local historian Ned Williams, was arranged one Tuesday afternoon and half a dozen members of the local history group in Quarry Bank joined us for an informative discussion about the town; past, present and future. They also helped steer the content of the community mural.

At the Tuesday drop-in instead of conducting structured oral history recordings in a quiet room or book times to meet people, we talked to people as the mural workshop was happening. We recorded conversations with a digital voice recorder. The benefit of this was that discussions were natural, fluid, interactive and people felt comfortable spending time with us and sharing their stories. However, with ten participants we ended up with over twelve hours of audio to listen to, much of poor sound quality, and had to then transcribe the parts we wanted to use. Here are some examples of the memories that people left with us:



John Timmins shared photos and humorous stories about life working at Round Oak Steel Works. He also showed us lots of photos of buildings in Brierley Hill before they were demolished.

“Fire brick works they mainly were, mainly centred on Brettal Lane and The Delph [...] My gran worked there as a brick moulder until she was in her 60s. And lots of my family worked in that particular one. Over the road from that it was known as George Kings, down The Delph there was at least two that I can think of and also every brick yard had its own clay pit or clay mine, if you like, so they’d mine the clay locally and then use it in the brick yards.”

---

*Jeanette Grazier, Stourbridge (from audio recording)*

“It was a farm of grassed-over pit banks... Ken Thomas (the farmer) used to keep Devon Red cattle... so in those fields on a nice sunny evening you could have the light reflecting off these Devon Red cattle... it was lovely. When they moved out... saw Cis once, that’s his wife, and, you know... apparently the story was she never came back to Merry Hill when they left... she never saw it. “Hello Cis, how you doing?” “Oh, alright”, she says “Not come back have yer? “No”, she says “they’ve put some shops there haven’t they?”



Round Oak Farm, Merry Hill. Image contributed by Peter Glews.

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*Dave Galley, Brierley Hill (from audio recording)*

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## Lessons Learnt

At the drop-in we chose to record audio of conversations in a very informal way. However, we ended up with hours of audio to listen to, much of which had poor sound quality. Depending on whether you want to use audio footage in the future, it might be worth asking people to write down and send in their memories.

When inviting people to 'drop in', you never know when people are going to turn up. Make sure that you have the capacity to sit down and talk without major interruptions for a reasonable length of time.

Have a scanner or copier to hand and take copies of old photographs or newspaper clippings people bring you. Always ask for a description and date for the photo so you can use them accurately in the future.

## Methodology – Pre-booked Oral History Recording Sessions

Brendan Hawthorne was employed to run three Round Oak reminiscence days at Artspace. A small room was used to conduct the interviews. Fourteen ex-workers took part, and an hour was allocated for each recording.

Each interview was recorded onto a non-obtrusive digital recorder and transcripts of each interview completed at a later date for archive purposes.

Interviews were structured by using a question prompt sheet to give the impression that each interview was a monologue or storytelling session so that the listener could pick up facts and anecdotes as well as hear how ex-employees sound with their regional and industrial accents and dialects.

“They steered their conversational approach towards important events and happenings, both serious and comical, within the works and its locale. Their (participants) passion and emotion often boiled over into tears of both sorrow and laughter. Their story preserved is now for the future”.

*Interviewer*

Bespoke documentation was prepared for the sessions so that all the information required by Dudley Archive Service, including consent for public use in the future, was obtained at the time of the recording.

“The participants told their story so that others may hear it first hand and not be derived through various publications. Their stories are honest, gritty and witty, in fact the essence of factory and community life.”

*Interviewer*



Here are some extracts from the oral history collected:

“I can remember the queues of lorries queuing up to get into Round Oak, the scrap wagons on the main outside... all the way down the road they was always there and I tell you what the queues of those scrap lorries was nearly as long as the queues of wives collecting the pay packets from their husbands on a Friday dinner when they obviously clocked out. That was to make sure that they never spent all their brass in the local drinking houses.”

---

*Robert Hamilton Cooper, former worker at Round Oak Steel Works.  
(Reminiscence session)*

---

“Thinking back it was a great place to work it really was. It was very much family orientated and I think it’s only right if it were possible to put some monument up... something in a prominent position for Brierley Hill cos that’s what Round Oak was, Brierley Hill.”

---

*David Vale, former worker at Round Oak Steel Works. (Reminiscence session)*

---

“Rumble of furnaces, hissing of the trains, bells of the trains, the crackings and banging of the scrap being loaded. Smell mainly of burning that was one of the things you could always smell.”

---

*Michael Minton, former worker at Round Oak Steel Works.  
(Reminiscence session)*

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## Lessons Learnt

When the mural artist was on holiday a musician ran a mandolin session with some participants at the time an oral history session was in progress. In busy spaces extraneous noises can distract those taking part and it can interfere with the quality of the sound recording. When programming multiple activities you should take into account the need for a quiet and comfortable space for recording audio.

Always back up digital recordings on CDs or other stable formats.

Oral history documentation was prepared for the project, based on previous examples of oral history projects. It is worth checking with the local archive that they are happy to accept your recordings and the documentation you are using is adequate. They may already have their own preferred format for cataloging audio.





## Approach Six: Arts and Crafts

*Engaging with people of all ages*

Written by Suzanne Carter

The aim of the arts and crafts workshops was to get people talking about Brierley Hill while involved in a fun, creative activity. The artwork produced would then reflect these discussions, thoughts and opinions.

We worked with members of two groups; Age UK and Homestart, and ran a family arts drop-in day. Workshops lasted for two hours.

Different approaches were taken in all three workshops to suit the age range of the participants involved.

### Methodology 1 – Reminiscence, Maps, Luggage Tags and Collage

Jon Dean incorporated various activities into the workshop with AgeUK, with a focus on reminiscence.

The session started by looking at historic photos of the town, reference books and old magazine cuttings.

Some of the participants who did not live in Brierley Hill at first were concerned they would not be able to get involved, but they soon realised they all had memories of the area. Having materials brought in sparked memories.

“The luggage tags were very good, the group were happy to write down expressions and ideas. Unfortunately the group are more talkers than artists and reluctant to get creative. Books and pictures were very well received and instigated conversations.”

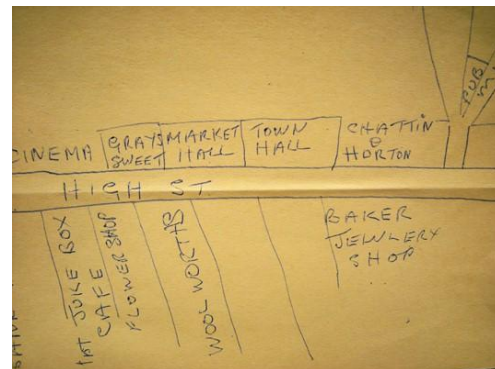
*Age UK Coordinator*



The next activity was making suitcase labels and writing words and expressions about Brierley Hill – what comes to mind when you think of the area? These were stuck on an old suitcase to create an installation.



Participants created their own maps and drawings of how they remember Brierley Hill High Street and memories associated with being there.



“Everyone enjoyed sharing their stories and that someone was interested in listening to them. Also they liked the feeling of being linked to and being part of the community”.

*AgeUK Coordinator*

This was followed by two High Street collages, produced on the themes of Brierley Hill *Today* and Brierley Hill *Past*.



Finally, the group were asked to draw up a list of the five most distinctive features of Brierley Hill. For this group it was: 1) Round Oak 2) Marsh & Baxters 3) Nine Locks 4) St Michael's 5) Market. These thoughts fed into the *Brierley Hillness* Community Mural.

## Lessons Learnt

Take into account some older people are reluctant to get creative through craft materials; painting or drawing could be difficult due to eye sight limitations or arthritis. Visual materials and discussion worked well with this group.

Negotiate workshops with participants and share the decision making to ensure they feel able to get involved. Plan a range of activities to ensure inclusive practice.

Be flexible about where the workshop is held. Transport to different locations can be challenging for some older people. We were thanked for taking the workshop to the group's activity centre.

## Methodology 2 – Hand Print Art

Shona Rose Gilson worked with children aged between 5 and 15 in this drop-in workshop at Artspace during the school holidays. An objective of the workshop was to get children and their families talking about Brierley Hill today and what they would like for the future Brierley Hill town centre.

Children were encouraged to write words they would like to use to describe Brierley Hill in the future around their handprint pictures.

“I found that encouraging my participants to engage with the theme slightly challenging as when asked to think of words which they would use to describe Brierley Hill, I felt that they found it hard to find positive things.”

*Workshop leader*







A tree collage was created using the participant's handprints as leaves and displayed in the Artspace shop window. Participants enjoyed contributing towards a group piece of art.

In planning the workshop we were hoping to ask participants to write the words on the actual fingers, so the hands would maintain their shape, but paint dries slower when you watch it!

## Lessons Learnt

If the participants do not know each other they may feel uncomfortable giving their opinions in front of the group. If one of the outcomes of the project is to learn more about what people think about their town, an individual self-completion questionnaire may be a good option, or an additional word-based activity planned.



Paint needs time to dry! The activity plan included writing words to describe the town on or around the handprints. This wasn't possible for all participants within the timescale of a drop-in workshop.

Everyone works at a different pace, so prepare additional art activities to keep people busy.

## Methodology – Paint and Postcards

Shona Rose Gilsean worked with children aged between 2 and 8 in this workshop with families who are involved with Homestart.

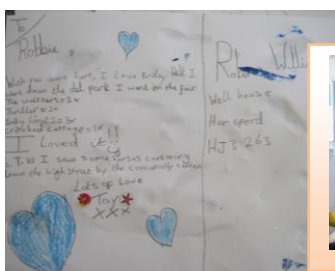
The workshop was designed to get mums working with their children to show us through art what buildings and places they associate with Brierley Hill.

The group were shown pictures of the town to spark recognition and asked to imagine they were visiting Brierley Hill on holiday. They then had to write a postcard to someone to tell them what it was like.

The two eight year olds in the group found it easy to talk about the town, what they liked about it and went there for. This was more difficult for the under five age group.

“It became apparent early on that the under fives in the group were not engaging with the postcard activity. They were producing some wonderful blocks of colour, shapes and textures – so we decided to do a group collage so their work could be included.”

*Workshop facilitator*



“Wish you were here. I love Brierley Hill. I went down the del park. I went on the fair. The Waltzers = 3x Triller = 2x Biby Limits = 3x Crooked cottage = 1x I loved it! B.T.W. I saw some horses cantering down the high street by the community centre. Lots of love Tay XXX”



“To Mom and Dad

We have had a great time in Brierley Hill. We have been to Barneys. I wish you was here too it is great here. I saw lots of big flats and I have been to McDonalds. I have been shopping to get some fruit. I love Brierley Hill. I have seen horses. Lots of love from Chloe”.

To create an outcome for the project that the under fives had contributed to we decided to produce a group collage.

Together the group decided what features of Brierley Hill should be in the collage – the flats, the market, the park and some shops.

Shona asked the older children and mums to draw specific things to go on the collage – people, market stalls, fruit, and ducks – or cut shapes from the paintings of the younger children.



Artwork used to make the collage

Shona assembled the collage.



## Lessons Learnt

A group collage worked well with the under five age group. They painted blocks of colour and textures, which the lead artist could use to create a picture of the town.

Using the postcard activity is a good way for people to think about positive experiences they have in a town as they associate postcards with holidays and good times.

Parents may think the workshop is just for their children and be reluctant to get involved in the main activity. Giving them specific tasks such as drawing a shop, a person or cutting out shapes for the collage increased their level of engagement.



# Approach Seven: Photography

*Engaging with adults of all ages*

Written by Suzanne Carter

Contributor: Siddique Hussain

Photography was used in the project in two ways; to capture Brierley Hill – artistically in content; and creatively to learn a new skill.

We were fortunate that Audiences Central through ArtsNation ran a photo competition to tie in with a Martin Parr photography exhibition running at ArtSpace at the same time. They themed this competition – what does Brierley Hill mean to you?

## Methodology – Photo Competition

This part of the project was run entirely by Audiences Central. People across Dudley Borough were invited to send in photos that reflected what Brierley Hill means to them.

There were photography-related prizes and the opportunity to have winning photos projected onto a building in Brierley Hill.

A *Brierley Hillness* Flickr group was set up, via a basic website and entrants uploaded their photos or emailed them.

The judging panel included a professional photographer.

During a free public evening event at ArtSpace, the seven winning images were projected onto the side of a building nearby. A PowerPoint presentation which also included promotion for the event and funder logos was looped for three hours.







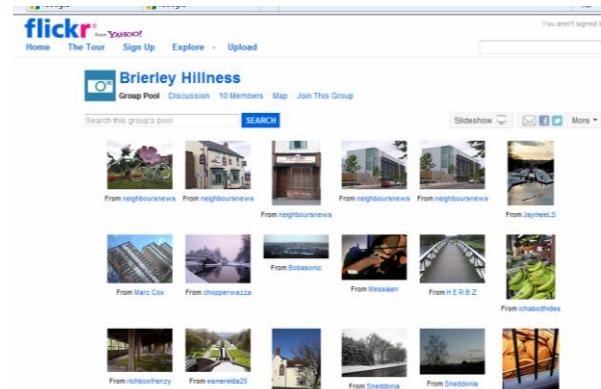
Pete Glews, one of the competition winners in front of his photograph projection.



## Lessons Learnt

Running competitions, with good prizes, can bring in a wider variety of participants and their families into a community project. For us it was a good way of finding out what Brierley Hillness means to more people.

A photo competition is a great way of collecting a range of images of the town – and documenting ‘life’ as well as buildings. There are 176 images of Brierley Hill on the Flickr account.



Projection is temporary and it can be expensive (hire and insurance of projector), but it takes exhibitions to new audiences. The projection was positioned next to a bus stop and opposite a pub, and gained a much wider and diverse audience than would have seen the work if it were displayed in an indoor gallery space.

## Methodology – Creating Streetscapes Using Photoshop



Large section of Brierley Hill High Street

In this half-day workshop led by Siddique Hussain, participants used digital cameras to take pictures of all the shops along a section of the High Street.

The participants were shown how to overlap the images, turn the camera into portrait orientation and take it off the 'auto' setting.



Digital photography is about learning about cameras, the art of good photography and using the computer to manipulate, enhance and share images in a creative way.

Participants were shown how to stitch the images together in Photoshop to form a streetscape panoramic.

"Digital cameras have put the power of recording powerful images into the hands of everyone and as most households also have a PC more and more people are learning to be more creative with their pictures. This project has helped residents to find another way to create and share photography."

*Workshop leader*



## Lessons Learnt

Using a busy high street as the focus of activity means you will have lots of traffic and parked cars to negotiate when stitching together images.

There is a limit to what can be achieved in one workshop. Learning this artistic skill takes time, and the participant's experience with technology also needs to be taken into consideration.

Having a streetscape panoramic image is useful as it gives people who do not know the area an instant 'flavour' of the place; showing the variety of architecture along a single street. It also helps people to appreciate the historic quality of the buildings. Many people do not look above the shop frontages.





## Approach Eight: Illustrated Talks & Performance

*Engaging with adults of all ages*

Written by Suzanne Carter

A free evening events programme was arranged to add another dimension to the *Brierley Hillness* project. It enabled us to involve experts and Council Officers in the project, and the public to learn more about the history and heritage of Brierley Hill. There were also performance nights, showcasing the talent of the young people that had been involved in creative workshops.

### Methodology

The events were held at Artspace, with a seating capacity of 40 people per event. The audience were asked to pre-book by signing up at Artspace in person, phoning or emailing. Almost a third of the audience at most events turned up on the night. Only one person contacted us by email.

Because the events programme was added after the main publicity had gone out, additional leaflets and posters were produced and distributed to venues locally, to some schools and to all community organisations in Brierley Hill.

An average of 20 people turned up at each of the six events which lasted from 7.30pm-9pm. Teas and coffees were served.

There was a further evening event to showcase winning work from the photo competition; images were projected on a nearby building. This part of the project was organised by Audiences Central (see Approach Seven: Photography).

**Brierley Hillness**  
A community arts and heritage project where the people of Brierley Hill can reflect on the past and help shape the future.

**Remembering Round Oak Steel Works**  
**An Illustrated Talk and Performance**

By **Steve Field** & **Brendan Hawthorne**  
Borough Artist, DMBC Black Country Performance Poet

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> March**  
Artspace, Mill Street  
7 for 7.30pm

Join Steve and Brendan for a nostalgic evening about Round Oak Hear stories and poetry that ex-workers have been sharing and see exhibition of memorabilia and paintings donated by local people. It will also unveil plans for a memorial sculpture to the Steel Work FREE entry. A buffet will be kindly provided by Tata Round Oak Supplies.

To book or find out more information contact **Steve Field** on [Steve.field@dudley.gov.uk](mailto:Steve.field@dudley.gov.uk) or 01902 894958.

Spaces are limited, so please book to avoid disappointment. We are operating a first come, first served booking system.

This is part of a programme of evening events about Brierley Hill being hosted by Artspace. Full details can be found at [www.brierleyhill.org](http://www.brierleyhill.org)

Artspace  
3 Maple Row  
Mill Street  
Brierley Hill  
DY5 2RH

What is Brierley Hillness to you?

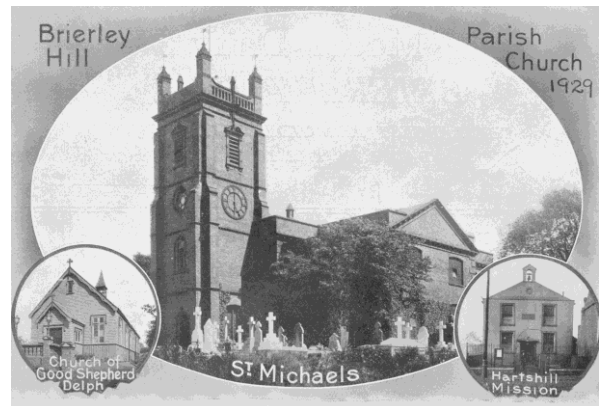
ARTSPACE ENGLISH HERITAGE E-CF DUDLEY



The event programme included:



Brierley Hill's Evolving Character (Illustrated talk)



Brierley Hill: Past and Present (Illustrated talk)



Remembering Round Oak Steel Works (Illustrated talk and performance poetry)

“What a good night it was to be present when these Round Oak Steelworkers were telling their stories. How good it was to get them together.”

*Audience member*

Brierley Hill  
Area Action Plan  
Planning for  
the Future



The Future of Brierley Hill Town Centre (Illustrated talk and consultation)



Brierley Hillness Photo Competition - building projection night (Showcase)





The Brierley Hill Project Presents... Verbal Eyes (Spoken word and MC-ing performance)



Film screening of the Dudley Performing Arts Production "One Boy. One Town. One Big Idea!" Originally performed at Brierley Hill Civic Hall earlier in the project (Showcase)

"Met some wonderful people – young and not so young who have similar ideals and interests and feel that old days aren't forgotten and future days are not so frightening"

*Regular audience member*

## Lessons Learnt

The illustrated talks and evening events were not part of the original project design, which meant that we had to design, print and distribute additional marketing material to promote the events. This was time consuming and labour intensive and only resulted in an average of 20 audience members per event. However, an evening events programme did offer more people the opportunity to get involved in aspects of the project and it provided a wealth of historical information and expertise in an informal and interactive setting. It is definitely worth planning this into an overall programme in future.

We wanted to programme something non-participatory or creative to see if we could engage with different audiences again. While attendance was fairly low, the illustrated talks on local history did attract people we hadn't already met, although mainly from a traditional heritage audience. The performance nights, on the other hand, brought in young people, friends and family and we were able to engage with a wider audience.

An overall weakness is that we didn't take the opportunity to provide any self-completion questionnaires at the evening events which would have strengthened the consultative element of the project.





## Approach Nine: Interviewing in the Streets

### *Engaging with people of all ages*

Written by Suzanne Carter

A couple of months into the *Brierley Hillness* project the number of individual participants taking part in the mural workshop or ‘dropping-in’ to speak to us was fairly low, and we had a lower than expected uptake of bespoke creative workshops for community groups.

We needed to speak to as many people as possible about Brierley Hill as part of our commitment to consultation, but realised that through the creative workshops alone, we were not gathering enough responses.

We needed to gather more ‘words’ ‘descriptions’, ‘perceptions’ and ‘ideas’ about the town. We needed a different approach.

While not part of the original project planning, conducting street interviews was a useful way to engage with people who live, work and shop in Brierley Hill, but were not necessarily interested in taking part in a creative activity through Artspace.

## Methodology

We employed Brierley Hill resident Shona-Rose Gilsean to conduct street interviews for a total of nineteen hours. These hours were spread over six sessions, and conducted on different days of the week to ensure maximum representation of different communities, ages and backgrounds as far as possible.



In Brierley Hill we selected Saturdays to reach the broadest age ranges; Tuesdays to reach the older generation and market shoppers; and Thursdays to reach those in receipt of benefits on payment day.

We decided to film the first eleven hours of the street interviews in order to create a short film aimed at future developers, planners and stakeholders in Brierley Hill – bringing the voice of the community to them in a very real way, rather than

presenting our findings in a written document. 25 of the interviews have been edited into a short film called *My Brierley Hill*. Available at [www.brierleyhillnesstoolkit.wordpress.com](http://www.brierleyhillnesstoolkit.wordpress.com)

Each of the 71 interviews completed followed the same line of questioning. We asked:

1. Do you live in Brierley Hill? If yes, for how long? If no, what brings you to Brierley Hill today?

2. What words would you use to describe Brierley Hill town centre - including High Street, Merry Hill and Waterfront?

3. What do you think is missing from Brierley Hill or would you like to see in Brierley Hill in the future?

4. What words would you like to be able to use in relation to Brierley Hill in 5 years time?

5. Do you feel there is a strong sense of community in Brierley Hill?

6. Do you think that new building designs should complement the existing historic buildings?

7. Which buildings do you consider to be landmark buildings in the town?



“Stressing that their opinion was valuable often swayed them to be interviewed, whereas others needed no encouragement at all and a short selection of questions often led into a comprehensive history lesson about the area”.

*Interviewer*

The questions we chose to ask were designed to get local people’s views about the town, but we also used this opportunity to gather material that we could later use creatively in publications and in film footage. We had this in mind from the start.



For example, in the publication *Understanding Brierley Hill: A Creative Community Response* we used the words people said to create an A-Z of words describing the town today, and then a further design to present words people would like to be able to use in the future (see page 47). This publication is available to download at [www.brierleyhillnesstoolkit.wordpress.com](http://www.brierleyhillnesstoolkit.wordpress.com)

During street interviews and two community workshops we asked people to describe Brierley Hill in a word or two...

Here is our  
A – Z compilation of responses.

- a A mess
- b Boring**
- c Cheap**
- d Dead**
- e Empty shops**
- f Flats
- g Going down hill**
- h Home
- i It's ok**
- j Just shop and go
- k Kebab places
- l Living in the past
- m Messy
- n Nice town
- o Out of date
- p Pretty neglected
- q Quieter than it used to be
- r Rubbish**
- s Scruffy**
- t Take aways**
- u Ugly
- v Value for money
- w Working class
- x X-tremely run down
- y Young people have no respect
- z Zzzzzzz

The larger the font, the greater frequency said.

During interviews and two community workshops we asked people how they would like to be able to describe Brierley Hill in five years time....

The larger the font, the greater frequency said.

Variety

**Better**

Appealing

Brighter

Beautiful

**Nice place to shop, visit and work**

**Improved**

Vibrant

Less traffic

**Friendly**

Pedestrianised

Safer

Shops reopened

Tidy

Pleasant

**Busier**

More shops

Maintain standard

Flowers

Interesting

**Cleaner**



We also asked people to vote on three descriptions in order to create a definition that captures the 'spirit' of Brierley Hill – which local people had endorsed.

These descriptions were:

1. Brierley Hill is a place which has been adopted by a new generation with new buildings and new roads; a once abandoned place is now an exciting place to be.
2. Brierley Hill is a decaying Black Country town; its buildings tell the story of a changing industrial landscape, steeped in memories which will remain as long as the buildings stand.
3. Brierley Hill is a worn out town with a strong sense of identity, enthusiastic to inspire and share all that is special, with an eye on the future and a stake in the past.

"I tended to sell the project to the passer-by with a short headline suggesting that I was looking to find out what people thought about the town and what things they would change or add. Once my busy shopper had stopped, I then explained that without the opinion of the local person, planners and developers could not give them what they wanted. "

*Interviewer*

The majority of people voted on the third definition as the most appropriate.



Every interviewee was asked to provide their postcode or area where they live, reason for being in Brierley Hill on that particular day, age range, and then we registered them as contributors to the project. Those filmed were also asked to sign a release form to give us permission to use their interview publicly.

The relevant parts of the filmed interviews were transcribed, and questionnaire responses collated to create workable raw data for analysis and further use.

Here are some examples of the quotes we have taken from the street interviews and used in a publication or in the film documentary:



“It may never recover what it was, but at least get some of it back and make it more attractive for shoppers.”

*Street Interview 2011*

“It would be nice if Brierley Hill was dressed up a bit so more people would be happy to come and spend the day shopping here, rather than look at it as if it is a dirty scruffy place.”

*Street Interview 2011*

“Brierley Hill is steeped in memories, definitely, and it’s steeped in history, and it’s just that we’ve got to keep that image in the town if we can.”

*Street Interview 2011*

“It’s our history and our history shouldn’t be swept under the carpet because of modernisation or anything else. Our history can still play a part in the present.”

*Street Interview 2011*

## Lessons Learnt

The benefits of having film footage is that you get stories, articulated opinions rather than the one or two word answers and best of all – personalities. Obviously there is a cost to filming and editing, and transcribing interviews can be time-consuming, but you get a fuller picture of what people think, local accents, humour and an engaging narrative which can be used to influence. Even if you don’t use the film footage to make a film, it can help researchers understand what is really being said. The questionnaire approach may be quicker, and certainly a cheaper option, but with the type of questions we were asking we ended up with a few words on a page. While the responses can be used in analysis and to create statistics, they offer less substance.

Be aware of the environment in which you are filming. Hammers banging, heavy traffic passing and loud background noises rendered some of our interviews unusable when editing the film, although we have still used what people said in written form.

We found that during a four hour session we were only able to film about 10 interviews. Not surprisingly people shy away from cameras and people with clipboards! Interviewing local traders is a good way of getting more people involved, and you can pre-book their time and visit them at their workplaces. If you are setting a target of people to speak to, then it may be worth having a test run of interviews to see how they go before finalising the timescale and the budget.



# Participation Summary and Statistics

The *Brierley Hillness* project ran from 11 January until 30 June 2011, although the majority of the participatory activity, events and survey work were finished by the end of April.

Below are statistics related to participation and indirect engagement through attendance at public events. All community contributors were asked to fill in a registration form so we could compile this data. We do not have completed forms from school children who were involved, but we do know the number of children who took part and their ages; we have included this information where appropriate.

## Direct Engagement and Participation

During the project over 360 local people of all ages contributed in some way to our understanding of *Brierley Hillness*; **70% of these people participated in a creative learning activity**. Participants were also involved in reminiscence and street interviews.

**A more detailed breakdown** (compiled from 361 contributor registrations)

- 27% (98) of people took part in a 'one off' creative workshop
- 43% (155) were involved in two or more workshops
- 20% (71) of people were interviewed in the street
- 10% (37) of these shared their stories, photographic images and memories.

## Indirect Engagement

- We reached 380 people through public events.

## Survey Work

- We involved a further 383 people in some type of survey work.



## SUMMARY

Through our *Brierley Hillness* work we have engaged with over 1120 people and got them thinking and talking about Brierley Hill; either through encouraging their creative expression, presenting representations of the town to them, or canvassing their thoughts and opinions about the town.

Throughout the process we have included a focus on the historic environment and heritage and hopefully raised awareness about the historic buildings and landscapes of the town.

## Demographics

### 1. Age Ranges (333 out of 361 known – representing 92% of contributors)

- 51% (171) aged under 16
- 10% (32) aged 16-24
- 10% (31) aged 25-44
- 14% (45) aged 45-65
- 16% (54) 65+

### 2. Residency (postcode analysis. 194 out of 239 registrations – representing 81% of community contributors).

*We do not have postcode information about the children we worked with through schools. However, three of the five schools were located in Brierley Hill. The other two local schools would have served children from Brierley Hill. We can make assumptions that the majority of children who participated live in Brierley Hill.*

*Statistics below are based on evidence we have available:*

- 60% (117/194) of contributors live in Brierley Hill ward - indicating DY5 and DY6 postcodes
- 30% (58/194) of contributors live in the wider Dudley Borough – indicating DY1-4, 7-9, 11 postcodes
- 10% (18/194) of contributors live outside Dudley Borough – including B17, B30, B63-67, WV3, 4 and 14.





## Budget

**We have included an outline budget as this can sometimes be useful when budgeting for further projects.**

Please note - we were able to work with many of the same community tutors as Artspace – through the Adult and Community Learning Service at Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. As a result we were able to pay agreed hourly rates to many freelance artists and workshop leaders (£18.20/hour), rather than full-day rates. There were no additional costs for venue hire during the project.

Our team of freelancers ran creative workshops totalling <b>218</b> hours.	£4050.00
Community mural – materials	£500.00
Three day reminiscence sessions - oral historian fees (day rate), transcription, documentation ready for archival deposit	£975.00
Events programme – we included a modest budget to pay for speakers not connected to Dudley MBC, and ran two creative writing workshops, leading to a performance (day rate).	£650.00
Marketing design and print – some print was also done in-house.	£1900.00
Commission for script writing and production costs of <i>One Boy. One Town. One Big Idea!</i> at Brierley Hill Civic Hall (match-funded by Dudley Performing Arts. Schools bought in the services of the dance tutors).	£1500.00
Street interviews, filming (2 ½ days) and production of <i>My Brierley Hill</i> film (including content editing fee – 3 days at freelancer hourly rate)	£2000.00
Project management – by Outreach Manager at English Heritage as part of core activity	£ 0.00
<i>Understanding Brierley Hill</i> - fee for compilation, design and edit (7 days at freelancer hourly rate)	£1020.00

**TOTAL APPROX £12,500**

**This publication and the Community Engagement Toolkit and Project Archive blog were developed and written as a voluntary contribution to the project.**

