Bow Arts Trust Case Study: Our Vision, Our East End

1 Summary
This project created a forum of local young people aged 14-18 from disadvantaged backgrounds in East London. The purpose of the group was to discuss and plan their own future arts programme and education space in the park area at the back of Bow Arts Trust. Participants generated ideas through discussion and creative activity. Their work is being presented to Leaside Regeneration and will form part of their public consultation for the space.

The immediate outcomes are that young people have felt involved and part of key decision making. They have collaborated with one another and acquired new skills in interior and external design, problem solving, film and model making. The long term results and impact of this project will become clear as the regeneration of the area takes place over the next few years.

2 The context
2.1 The Organisation
Bow Arts Trust was established in 1995 in the heart of the East End of London. It is a registered educational charity and a company limited by guarantee. The Trust’s prime ambition has been to build and manage a widely accessible art gallery - The Nunnery, and to run a London wide educational program as a complement to it’s artists’ studios. The education programme currently works with 50 schools and community groups through a combination of outreach and onsite work. We focus on bridging the gap between classroom art activity and contemporary visual art as seen in galleries.

The Bow Arts Trust does not receive any core funding. It is an independent organisation and operates a not for profit business model, partnering with schools to pay for the running of the education department and programme. There are 5 staff at Bow Arts Trust.

2.2 The Situation
The gallery currently has no dedicated workshop space for creative activities. Bow Arts Trust wanted to explore ideas for a new space and programme that could meet the needs of local young people and extend onsite provision.

2.3 The Idea
Our idea was to set up a forum to consult with local young people and ascertain what sort of educational space and programme they would
use, value, respect and enjoy. We chose to do this in a way that was active, creative and engaging for the young people but also placed them at the centre of the decision making process.

3 The project
3.1 Planning
This project was planned with the staff team to fit into the long-term vision for the Bow Arts Trust: securing our position in the community as an accessible gallery and educational facility that is shaped and modified by the community it serves. The work also strengthened our growing partnership with Leaside Regeneration.

We selected our schools based on established partnerships and locality. Both fell into the catchment area for Leaside Regeneration’s Bow Gateway Project (see appendix) and the designated regeneration zone for the Olympics.

The artist, Howard Matthew was selected based on his past experiences of working on projects collaborating with young people, architects and regeneration organisations and his skills in using green-screen processing, Photoshop and film.

We made time at the beginning of the project with the teachers, artist and gallery to plan the programme. After each session we built in time to review what had worked, what had not and whether we needed to change anything before the next session. The young people were involved in reviewing the programme as it was conducted. We gathered their comments through regular discussions, post it activities and group interviews. This allowed us to introduce new materials on their request and change the programme format to suit their needs.

3.1 Delivery
This project involved 20 students aged 14 to 18 and 3 teachers from Central Foundation School for Girls and Bow School. There were eight 2-hour after-school sessions between March and May 2006. These sessions took place within both the two schools and at the Nunnery Gallery. Initially the schools worked separately in single sex groups with up to 10 participants in each.

The project started with the young people discussing, considering and visually recording what sort of education space they would like to work in? What resources and equipment they would need in that space? And what arts activities they would like made available to them? Using a range of visual examples for inspiration was useful as many of the young people had limited experience of galleries and educational spaces beyond their school environment. The project developed through site visits, modelling, visualising ideas through Photoshop, green screen technology and peer critique via postcard between the groups.

Due to a drop in attendance (caused by a number of issues including school closure, work experience and illness), we decided to combine
the two groups, with positive results. Connections were made between
the 2 projects, combining the different skills and abilities of the
participants, resolving continuity issues, doubling the time we had left
with the students and keeping the momentum and numbers as high as
possible.

A final DVD communicating the young people’s thoughts and ideas was
edited and presented to Leaside Regeneration, Bow Arts Trust and the
public in our annual ‘Schools in View’ exhibition on June 8th at the
Nunnery Gallery.

4 Outcomes
4.1 Impact on Participants
This project gave the young people opportunities to acquire new skills
and understanding. It was clear that throughout the duration of the
project their skills, knowledge and interest improved ‘It was something
new and met my expectations to learn new skills’ Tony year 10.
Students reported that they had enjoyed the design process and that it
was valuable to be involved in something that was real and tangible. As
Shuhel year 10 describes: ‘I’ve taken the project more seriously than
school projects as it’s something real. It’s good experience for my
career as the design may be realised and that’s very exciting’.
The project allowed young people to consider new creative career
options or confirm and reinforce their existing interests. Viktorius, year
10 showed a new interest in design and model making ‘It gave me an
interest in the design process and I would like to follow this path
further.’ Whilst Aleur and Shuhel expressed a growing interest in
architecture: ‘I thought I might be interested in architecture before the
project and this has made up my mind.’
However, the young people did report a variety of problems in taking
part, these were pre-dominantly conflicts with school and family
commitments, however, when asked there was a unanimous response
from everyone that there were ‘no regrets in taking part’.
Young people enjoyed working collaboratively and many of them
commented on the value of working as a team: ‘I had a good time in
the project and thought we worked out different peoples design ideas
as a team. It was good when we combined our ideas at the
beginning… to come up with our model’ Zak, year 10, ‘It was fun
problem-solving and working as a group rather than individually.’ Tony,
year 10.
Many of the young people reported that they had enjoyed getting out of
school and being in a new environment and that the project had
changed their appreciation of their locality ‘It’s changed how I look at
my local area and how the surroundings work together.’ Aurra, year 11.
I observed that the young people were taking a greater interest in
observing buildings and in the course of the project increasingly made
comments on the textures, different materials and design features of
buildings in their area.
4.2 Impact on Others Involved
The artist learned more about working with 14-15 year olds and was surprised by their capability: ‘It’s now very apparent that the timescale was too ambitious, this was in part an oversight on my part as I didn’t recognise that students aged 14-15 would rightly identify and pick up on the complexity of creating a new educational space – i.e.: size, materials budget etc.’ Howard.
I learned from having a critical friend and valued the opportunity to talk through the project and focus my interview questions for the final sessions.

4.3 Institutional Change
The effects at an institutional level will become more apparent over the months as the findings of this programme are shared with Leaside Regeneration. The young people’s suggestions of activities for the programme will be taken up by the education department at Bow Arts Trust.

5 Lessons learned
5.1 What worked and what didn’t
Five things that this project got right:

- Evaluation: everyone was involved in evaluation and self reflection; teachers, students, the artist and Bow Arts Trust. A range of approaches were used throughout the project, including interviews, observation, post it games and sending postcards.
- Using plenty of visual stimuli projected large in the gallery was useful for impact, inspiration and for providing context.
- The young people were able to see that their project could contribute to real changes in their community which was empowering
- Collaboration: The communication with teachers, the artist and Bow Arts Trust was regular and effective allowing us to discuss and implement necessary changes along the way.
- Careful planning of the participant interview questions was useful for getting a realistic idea of the young peoples’ experiences.

In hindsight the project outcomes were over ambitious in the given timeframe. The project would have benefited from more time spent on building relationships between the participants and the artist and less time being concerned about getting through the programme in order to achieve the desired outcomes. Ideally there would have been more sessions so that the young people could be involved in editing the DVD.
The project funding came too late to effectively involve the young people in planning the project though they contributed to how it took shape once it started.
I think that the project may have been more cohesive and provided a more fruitful exchange had we combined the groups earlier in the programme.

5.2 **Next Steps**

The *Schools In View* show opened on June 8th 2006. The opening was a great success, with over a hundred young people, families, teachers, parents, artists, funders and local press attending. The boys who took part in the en-vision programme all attended the private view and seemed very proud of their work. The girls were unable to attend due to a clash with their GCSE’s. Leaside Regeneration is meeting with us and the young people to present the work. Their ideas will then be fed into Leaside’s public consultation, which we hope will influence the building of an activity centre at Bow Arts Trust to further serve the needs of the young people in our community.

6 **Appendix**

6.1 **Examples of the Building Designs In Situ**

![Building Design](image1)

![Building Design](image2)

6.2 **Bow Gateway Project – Objectives**

The key aims of this project are to significantly improve the landmark quality of the A11/A12 intersection at Bow Roundabout, Stratford High Street as a
‘gateway’ to East London and the Lower Lea Valley, reconnect communities and create an enhanced urban realm with safe pedestrian accessibility throughout.

The subsidiary aims of the project are:

- to initiate a programme of improvements identified as part of the A12/A13 Study and compliment the planned improvements to the adjacent Bow Flyover and roundabout.
- to link with, and add value to other local regeneration projects.
- to improve the image and promote the area for business and other investment.
- to raise the profile of an important heritage building and attract tourism.
- to reduce the impact of a traffic dominated area and improve pedestrian safety.
- to improve a public space and provide access to new public facilities.
- to conserve and improve an important landmark as a gateway to east London.
- to actively involve the local community in the redevelopment of this heritage site.

The need for the project was highlighted by an SRB6 funded feasibility study involving consultation with the local community into physical improvements to enhance the environment along and adjacent to the A12 and A13 routes. The project forms part of, and compliments the work carried out as part of the original Bow Church Masterplan, winner of Best Community Initiative and Partnership Project at the 2004 London Planning Awards and recently selected as one of the Mayor’s one hundred spaces. A number of the physical enhancements planned have already been completed and include: illumination and restoration of St. Mary’s Bow Church (one of the oldest buildings in east London) development of The Bow Arts Trust (a local Arts Centre providing studios and educational outreach), development of Corbin House Gardens and the ‘Green Wall’ (an ecological sound barrier pilot project) and development of Bow Bridge Estate gardens.

The purpose of this project is to prepare for and deliver the following three main initiatives in order to fulfil the aim of creating a high quality environment which reconnects communities and acts as a gateway to east London and the Lower Lea Valley:

1. Connect the towpath beneath the Bow roundabout to improve pedestrian accessibility and create a continuous route along the river Lea in accordance with British waterways aims and objectives
2. Develop a new public space and crossing on the A11
3. Resolve the traffic issues of the gyratory/overpass and create a high quality urban realm, which forms part of the new gateway.

6.3 Bow Gateway - Project Details

There are three main elements to the Bow Gateway project:

- Creation of a floating towpath beneath the Bow roundabout
• Creation of a new crossing and public space at the west end of the Bow Church island
• Redevelopment of the Bow Roundabout gyratory, overpass and urban realm

**Floating Towpath**
Leaside Regeneration has been successful in submitting an appraisal to the SRB6 Board for sufficient funding to commission a Technical Study of the Floating Towpath Proposal. The report is largely complete and will provide the necessary technical information for developing each resolution option. The project objective is to improve pedestrian access beneath the A11/A12 intersection at Bow Roundabout, Stratford High Street. At present, towpath users must leave the canal, cross the busy A11/A12 intersection and subsequently rejoin the canal. Pedestrian access is both inconvenient and hazardous. In order to improve safe pedestrian access through the site a walkway is proposed that will link the existing towpath on either side of the road. The walkway will be suitable for pedestrian use. The towpath to the east of the intersection is situated to the south of the canal. The towpath to the west of the canal is situated to the north of the canal. The walkway linking the two sections of towpath will therefore be required to bridge the canal.

**Crossing and public space**
The new public space at Gladstone monument is proposed as a highly visible and high profile phase of works which could be implemented as a self-contained package of work or as part of the wider vision. The public space around the Gladstone monument addresses two different scales of use. At a local scale it provides access to the church and accommodates pedestrians whilst at the scale of the city it marks a historic gateway to London and the Lower Lea Valley and Olympic site. The proposals for the new public space aim to address the different scales of use and improve the safety of the pedestrian crossings whilst responding with imagination to the existing features, significance and history of the place.

At the western end of the Bow Church Island there are important pedestrian crossings over the Bow Road (A11), the road is extremely busy (44,000 vehicles in 24 hours) and there have been a number of serious accidents at the crossings. Through moving the existing vehicle cut-through and using the space made available by the traffic adjustments on Bow Road, the public space can be extended and rationalised. The pedestrian crossings are realigned and upgraded to give a more generous, direct and safer route. The Gladstone Monument is relocated to the ‘nose’ of the extended island, which is raised up giving the statue a prominent and uncluttered position. Railings around entrances to both Edwardian toilets are removed/replaced. The hidden pavement lights, and part of the Gents stairwell, are replaced by two new areas of glazed paving that reveal and light the once hidden spaces below ground. These glazed panels incorporate site-specific artwork, which communicates the history of the church and the Gladstone
Monument. The areas of glazed paving are set flush into a new level poured surface which allows pedestrians to move freely across the space.

The access to the underground spaces is upgraded and rationalised to de-clutter the island, and a new raw art venue is proposed in place of the former gents toilet. The proximity to the Nunnery Gallery would lend itself to being managed and curated as an additional venue by the Bow Arts Trust.

Work will be carried out to raise public awareness and interest in this important heritage site. With the help of church representatives, local historians, Tower Hamlets Council’s Conservation Department and the local community, special heritage presentation and information panels will be produced to tell the story of the site. The church will also prepare and make available to the public historic artifacts and papers currently in their archives. This will make the church more accessible to the public help and help stimulate interest in it by the local community.

Gyratory, overpass and public realm
St. Mary’s Bow Church, located in the middle of the A11 and adjacent to the Bow Roundabout is an ancient (dated to 1300’s) and significant part of the Bow Gateway. A first phase of physical improvements to the Church and its environs were initiated by Leaside Regeneration and completed in early 2004. These included restoration of the church clocktower, architectural illumination of the site, reduction of trees and general restoration of the Churchyard and perimeter. The Bow Gateway Project aims to build upon this work by:

• resolving the traffic issues of the gyratory and overpass through a series of traffic modeling exercises based on the strategy of the Bow Church masterplan
• transform the urban desert into a welcoming gateway through the use of high quality design and environmental enhancement
• providing a vital link between Stratford and east London
• reclaim the area for local communities by creating a series of safe and easily accessible pedestrian routes and crossings
• complete work in time for the gateway to welcome people to both the Lower Lea Valley and the site for the 2012 Olympic Games
• involve local people and local enterprises in the process of creation through to implementation

Overall project management of the Bow Gateway project will be the responsibility of Leaside Regeneration Ltd. Development and delivery of the floating towpath and footbridge will be the responsibility of British Waterways. Development and delivery of the changes in urban realm to the roundabout and flyover will be the responsibility of TFL. Development and delivery of the A11 crossing will be the responsibility of Leaside Regeneration together with TFL and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. There will be a Bow Gateway Working Group managed by Leaside
Regeneration and made up of members from Transport For London, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, London Borough of Newham and the Greater London Authority. The entire project will be overseen by the Bow Gateway Steering Group which will be managed by Leaside Regeneration and includes members from: Transport For London, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, London Borough of Newham, the Greater London Authority, Wilfred East Housing Association, Bromley by Bow Centre, Bow Bridge Estate, Bow Arts Trust, Bow Church and British Waterways.

The overall budget forecast for the entire project is eight million pounds over four years, but this will be subject to reappraisal on receipt of more accurate costings at the end of the first phase of preparatory works/options analysis.