

WALSALL, WEST MIDLANDS

Walsall is a town of 68,000 people, part of an urban conurbation just north of Birmingham. With Sandwell and Dudley, Walsall forms the 'Black Country', a name coined in the 19th century due to the appearance of its coal and ironstone mining, limestone quarrying, brick-making, and metal and leather working. Large-scale industry in the area declined in the latter half of the 20th century, however, leaving Walsall with 11.4% unemployment in 1991.

The New Art Gallery opened in 2000, built to house the magnificent and eclectic Garman Ryan Collection, donated to Walsall in 1973 by Lady Kathleen Epstein. Works by Van Gogh, Turner and Constable amongst others form the core of its displays, accompanied by a programme of contemporary art exhibitions. These have become steadily more popular, with a peak in visitors in 2013 to a Damien Hirst retrospective.

Hopes were high for spectacular waterfront regeneration. In reality change to the Town Wharf area has been slow, yet the presence of the gallery has been credited with leveraging investment from developers.

Its original remit – to be accessible to all – continues to be seen in recent activities. It works with all levels of education in the area, as well as hosting a long-running programme of events for different faith communities. It is committed to the development of early career artists and runs an ongoing programme of residencies, as well as providing exhibition opportunities in its fourth floor gallery.

BECOMING AWESOMESTOW

11–26 April

A research project by Julie Ramage and Dr Lorna Hards

11–26 April 2015
Ground Floor Corridor, Reid Building, The Glasgow School of Art,
164 Renfrew Street, Glasgow, G36RT
Open: Mon–Sun 10am–4.30pm

Nesta... THE GLASGOW
SCHOOL OF ART



CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONS

- Existing gallery inadequate for the display of the collections held or to accommodate audiences for contemporary exhibitions
- Leisure, cultural and recreational opportunities felt by local council to be much needed
- Walsall Canal arm derelict
- Town Wharf area of Walsall under-used
- Lack of footfall in this area

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE INTERVENTION

- To create a visual arts centre of recognised excellence and a model of national accessibility
- To contribute to Walsall's regeneration and act as a catalyst for future cultural and economic development, including retail and residential
- To be a key part of a new cultural and leisure destination alongside Walsall Canal

THEORY OF CHANGE

- Building a new gallery will make it fit for purpose
- A larger gallery with better facilities will make more art accessible to broader audiences
- The local community will become engaged in activities
- The gallery will attract creative talent and activity
- The gallery will contribute to the development of a cultural destination at Town Wharf
- Walsall will be a better place to live and to visit

INPUTS

- Arts Lottery funding
- European funding
- Funding from Walsall City Challenge
- Proceeds from lease of land adjacent to gallery (after demolition of cinema)

ACTIVITIES

- New Art Gallery constructed
- New Art Gallery presents displays of collections and 3-5 temporary exhibitions annually
- Marketing and promotion of events locally and nationally
- Education and artist development activity, school visits
- Artist residencies for early career artists

IMPACT

- Improved appearance of Town Wharf with more land in use
- Important art collection on display in better conditions with better public facilities
- Improvement in the cultural offer
- Increased investment in development in the area

OUTCOMES

- Critically acclaimed gallery 'on the map' nationally
- Improved appearance of the area
- Leverage for development of Town Wharf area
- Point of reference for other developments
- Confidence amongst developers to build higher spec housing

OUTPUTS

- Visitors to Walsall Town Centre
- Opportunities for local people to see major exhibitions
- Employment in the gallery, shop and cafe
- New public/civic space in which to meet
- Bespoke public space projects in the public realm

