

An Artist's Way ...



Pif-Paf's guide to making work in neighbourhoods

www.pif-paf.co.uk

**Pif-Paf is an established outdoor arts company based in Sheffield.
We tour a diverse range of work with an emphasis on innovative structures and interactivity.**

The main reason we wanted to make this document was to acknowledge the overwhelmingly positive audience response to work that was presented in people's own neighbourhoods. Taking creative work to people's doorsteps had an impact that we found special and important, and so want to share our enthusiasm of making work in this way.



MAW outside the job centre

This resource will share lessons learnt during the process of creating 2 different versions of our show *Moths At Work (MAW)*.

We have also been in conversation with other artists and producers who have shared experiences of creating work in neighbourhoods, and so we reference their work within this document. These include Justine Squires (*Corvus Angelicus*); Matt Pang (*The Happy Heart Bike*); Musical Ruth (*Circo Rum Ba Ba*); Stella Hall (*Festival of Thrift*); Kat Boon (*Appetite Stoke*); *Hobbit* (*Can't Sit Still and Stuff and Nonsense*); Dan Fox (*Sound Intervention*); Jude Jagger (*Quays Culture*), and Barra Collins (*LAStheatre*).

What do we mean by neighbourhoods?

By neighbourhood we mean residential areas, taking work directly to people on the street where they live, at their front doors, windows, gardens or in a local park.

The work is without any infrastructure. We use battery power, there are no road closures or marketing, and simple requirements like access to toilets, a kettle and parking cannot be guaranteed. Self-sufficiency is key.

Every artist's work in neighbourhoods will be different and so the rules, regulations and logistics will vary between local authorities, but we hope to help you get the ball rolling and make your decisions and actions more informed.

Our experience was hugely affected by Covid. The pandemic taught us that things may change, and so you need to keep on top of fluctuating guidelines and recommendations, especially regarding covid safety.

Who is this resource for?

- Artists who want to take on more organisation and production management of their own work for neighbourhoods
- Producers who want more understanding of the artist's point of view of delivering work in neighbourhoods

Moths At Work (MAW)

MAW toured to neighbourhoods – firstly along residential roads after dark and then along pavements in daylight. Both shows have two characters called 'Moth Electricians' who work around a central structure. At first, they 'gather' light to charge a giant Lightbulb, raising a Moon high into the air on a pneumatic ram. Both versions have sound as an integral element, minimising the use of text. The LightBulb was commissioned by Stellar Projects and Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council in Winter 2020, and the Moon was supported by ACE, SYHA, Right Up Our Street, and Barnsley Council, to tour round South Yorkshire in Summer 2021.

We created works that could be enjoyed as a passing visual image or a rolling 1-3-minute interaction. We did 2 x 50-minute sets a day with a short break. We had two performers, a production manager and freelance staff provided by local partners.

There is no easy straight line through all the factors in need of consideration when making this kind of work, so here is our glossary of terms, broken into three sections, in the order you might run into them.

1. THE IDEA - Creating work for neighbourhoods & what to consider during creation.



Photography: Dawn McNamara

SPEED, SOUND, SCALE – We create work that is noisy enough and slow paced enough, for folk to hear us coming and get to their window or door by the time we arrive at their house. We experienced people calling their neighbours to let them know something was happening.

There are many battery powered sound solutions that can be used for travelling work, either off the shelf or cobbled together with cheap 12v amps and second hand speakers.

MAW consistently covered 0.5 miles an hour, which was just the right time for people to engage with the work. The sound is often our main marketing tool for our work, people hear something, they come to their window or door to see what's happening.

When considering scale, smaller is easier, especially when working on pavements. If you go larger in scale and crew, you may start to justify road closures with extra logistics to consider.

THE SCORE (performance framework) - As with walkabout, there is a balancing act between setting strong clear content whilst leaving flexibility to be able to react/interact in the moment. We created an improvisational score to lay out the “game”, have an audience interaction and then wrap it up strongly. We thought a lot about the “goodbye” - the audience watch you walk away, so you need to be clear about what you want them to feel/experience, as the interaction ends.

MARKETING – you will likely work with your partners when planning whether to market your work, or whether you want it to be a surprise. After our learnings through working during the lockdown, we would not market this sort of work in the future, because we had enough audience for the work we presented. We were really happy to be a surprise on the street; it was exciting, gave flexibility and kept audience numbers small to manage the very real risk of traffic accidents. Other companies choose to do Facebook marketing or door to door leaflet drops.

TICKETING – several companies responded to lockdowns by offering intimate shows at people’s front steps for which tickets were bought. We spoke to [Can’t Sit Still](#) and [Stuff and Nonsense](#) about their positive experiences. Their work bypassed permissions as they performed on private property. They had a mixture of projects, dashing around Bristol and Bridport performing small shows for all ages, with local residents and passers by getting some of the action.

ARTISTIC CREW – for MAW on pavements (effectively a walkabout performance) we have 4 people trained up and a crew of 3 each day, 2 performing and 1 as a production manager/outside eye/spotter.

Partners may be able to provide extra crew to support your work such as production support or stewarding. A bigger artistic crew may attract a bigger audience, but it can sometimes make the work less interactive and spontaneous.

The performers will be busy performing so you may want to allocate the role of ‘Spotter’ to your production manager. They keep an eye out for less obvious potential audience, so you reach as many people as possible.

PRODUCTION MANAGERS can take on many of the things that come in part 3. If you have a larger project, it’s worth adding this person into your funding bids/fees. We chose to do it all ourselves so that we could shape the art around the logistics, responding to developments ourselves rather than bring in a third party.

PARTNERS – local authorities, festivals, or projects that may support you should be quizzed for leads into their local communities, often full of on-the-ground local knowledge. Ask them to support your dealings with the council, including Health and Safety, risk assessments and permissions; potentially they do can some of these tasks more easily than you.

It is always better to have a cash input/fee from partners, as they will be more committed to supporting you throughout the project.

ACTION RESEARCH/REHEARSALS – with interactive work the show is born through the performing of it. We kept an “Action Research” head on for all our performances, giving and receiving notes and developing the improvisational score. Ensure to plan in some time to return to rehearsals after a few shows, to build on what you discover whilst performing. Each neighbourhood inspires a different performance.



DOORSTEPS AND PAVEMENTS – we love a pavement! MAW Moon is 90cm wide and can cruise the footways. Performers and audience may struggle to pass, so you need to think about accessibility for wheelchair users and prams.

Be strict in rehearsals when thinking about dimensions of the pavement and areas where you will be performing. This was one of the biggest differences between working in the town versus the neighbourhood.

Have a performance plan for crossing the road. The Production Manager needs to be ahead of the performance, checking for obstructions well ahead.

There are many artists, companies, festivals working in this field, here are some examples:



STILTS - A great example of neighbourhood stilts is [Corvus Angelicus](#), which toured local streets after dark over winter 2020/21. Their work included illuminated angel costumes.

Photography: Corvus Angelicus



Photography: Dan Fox

PROJECTIONS – Appetite Stoke successfully presented the [Projector Bikes](#) around neighbourhoods in 2020 which opens a new set of after dark possibilities. A very useful lesson they shared is that the residents can't see projections onto their own houses! Quays Culture developed a different take on neighbourhood projections with [Mystery Bird](#).

SOUND WALKS / AUDIO TRAILS – can overcome many of the logistical issues of live performance. [Dan Fox, Sound Intervention](#) and [LAsTheatre](#) have explored located sound projects which have much broader use than just neighbourhoods. Dan has presented work in Collision and Conflict at [Green Croft on the Wall](#). LAsTheatre have created [Home](#) on the [Echoes](#) platform and [The Curious Case of Aberlhiw](#) was created on the [Action Bound](#) app with [Taking Flight](#). Action Bound is simple to use and, with a bit of tinkering, allows artists to integrate powerful accessibility features into their experiences – screen reader, BSL videos etc. This piece now has a mixture of app-based scavenger hunt and live action.

SCAVENGER HUNTS – is a growing genre that covers live and app-based work, see [The Curious Case of Aberlhiw](#).

AUGMENTED REALITY (AR) – has a very rich future. There are uncertainties about how good geolocation is for AR apps. There are independent creative technologists out there who can make AR work for you, and who understand the arts world constraints. Creating a simple app to display AR “assets” whether models, video, or audio is relatively straight forward but getting it through the app stores is quite an undertaking. This is a growing area as manufacturers build the necessary tech in to new generations of devices.

FESTIVALS – [Festival of Thrift](#) is just one example of taking a festival to neighbourhoods - in 2020 they did the festival for 70 households with [activity packs](#) in the run up (online and printed for the digitally disadvantaged), and a full day of events including parade, bike fixing, music and planting.



Photography: LAs theatre & Taking Flight

2. PRACTICALITIES - Things that will support the creative ideas

TIMINGS – consider the best times to perform. Our sweet spot was starting after the schools kick out and ending before kids' bedtime, so approximately 3pm-6pm. This time worked well for our audiences. This timing decision also considered our crew, it meant we could get home to help with our own kids' bath time! By working on weekdays, you still have the flexibility to tour at weekends. There will be nuance for summer holidays.

DOCUMENTING YOUR EVENT – with much of the best bits of the shows happening on someone's property, documenting the work needs extra thought. Unlike attending an event, neighbourhood audiences don't expect to be photographed or filmed during the experience. We did not find a solution for this and have little documentation of audiences. Dan Fox successfully used a small 360 camera mounted on a bike to capture the whole of some of his journeys.

SITE VISITS – not only vital, but also a good place to **CHAT** to local people as a first step. It takes very little to spark a conversation and you will find out useful local information like school kicking out time times and routes. Try to visit at the time you will be performing and be aware of changing parking and traffic through the day, weeks, and months.

SCHOOLS – schools finish at about 3pm. During your site visit check out the flow of families and find a sweet spot where it is busy but not too crazy. We had moments when there were too many families trying to pass us on narrow pavements. Note that Senior, Junior, and Infant schools all have very different rhythms and pace around how they leave the school grounds.

DRESSING ROOMS AND TOILETS – if you are performing close to home you can fix performance locations near crew members' houses. We've changed in the van and warmed up on the pavement (gets those nerves out of the way). Good partners can get you in touch with community facilities, pubs and sports clubs, which will also get you secure parking.

PARKS – there are many busy neighbourhood parks where performing is really valuable. You can avoid a lot of red tape if you do not perform on the Highway.

AUDIENCE ALLIES/AVOIDING TROUBLE – we have performed in some pretty spicy areas and had no real trouble. Encouraging Mums and Grans to be on your side is a great way to keep the event smooth! You have to stay one step ahead of any distracted kids and have some surprises up your sleeve.

WEATHER – be prepared! Often in summer 4pm-6pm is the time for storms, but equally don't forget the sunscreen.

3. LEGALITIES, AUTHORITIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

We have listed below some of the procedures you may need in place, to work safely and within council/government guidelines.

RULES – depending on who you are what you are doing and who is paying for it you need to make decisions about which can of worms you want to open.

If you are an artist used to working in organised festivals this will be frustrating and it can feel like you are spiraling into ever more admin. It can feel like your artistic dream is lost in a sea of email CCs from the council asking if you have firearms, tigers or aeroplanes. This was a learning curve for us, and we hope it gets easier second time around.

You can design your activity to make your life easier, but the best thing is to be prepared to spend time on this preparatory work and be as Zen as you can.

A COUNCIL ALLY onboard at the start of the project can make this a lot easier for you helping you prepare and submit the required documents.

We had great allies in local arts organisations as well, but they did not have the same ease in the systems as allies in council Events Team.

We made the decision to run our plans past our **INSURERS** where we found out we could not get cover to work on highways without a road closure.

RAMS (Risk Assessment Method Statement) – this a document where you lay out the practical details an outsider needs to understand about your work, and you risk assess all elements of it. It proves you know what you are doing and that you and the activity are safe. A RAMS makes you clarify your plan and allows people to trust you.

TENs (Temporary Events Notices) – you may need one of these if you are performing on unlicensed premises in England and Wales. More information can be found here: [Temporary Events Notice \(England and Wales\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/temporary-events-notice-england-and-wales) There will be someone at the local council who will support you to know if you require one or not. Check with them at least a month before the performance and be prepared for some confusion as to if you need one or not.

SAGs (The Safety Advisory Group) – where all the bodies that are involved in event planning meet to make sure the event runs safely and smoothly. This includes Police, Fire Service, highways, public health and festival organisers. Each council will have a different set up but broadly you need to find the person who convenes the SAG and who distributes information. Send them a short summary of your work asking what they need from you which may include an EVENT PLAN (example attached). They will need precise dates and times of your event. Check the **SAG's** timescales against your show ambitions ASAP! You need all the documents ready well in advance of the performance dates to allow for this.

FIRST AID – the Pif-Paf creative crew undertook emergency first aid courses on-line for about £25 taking a few hours to complete. It was time and money well spent and satisfied the basic requirements. You may want to have a more qualified first aider on your team when delivering work like this. Our Production Manager role carries a rucksack with first aid kit, documentation, maps, snacks, sunscreen, and water.

PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE (PLI) – you will need to email this to lots of people. You may want to share your RAMs with your insurance company to check your specific activity is covered. We do this with anything unusual we do, so we can feel reassured that if anything happens we'll be covered.



ROADS AND HIGHWAYS – if you want to work on a road (The Highway) you need to be aware of a thick layer of constraints - for obvious reasons. We could not get insurance to do a performance on the highway, even on quiet streets, without a road closure costing about £800 and needing to be undertaken by a specialist steward with a Chapter 8 qualification.

CONTROLLING TRAFFIC – unless you have a **Chapter 8** qualification you are not allowed to direct or control traffic or set up a road closure. Asking cars to stop or waving them past is a big no no! Everyone in your team needs to know this.

COVID SAFETY – so many of the factors we faced for MAW were unique to changes and restrictions brought on by the pandemic. Permissions were hard to obtain as the events teams were setting up vaccination stations and there was much wariness about people gathering and covid safety. This caution was helpful in planning to avoid overcrowding that could lead to a road traffic accident. Make sure you include your Covid Safety Policy within your risk assessment, this will show what your company will do to ensure you keep yourselves and others safe. This may include lateral flow tests, carrying hand sanitiser and maintaining social distancing.

Photography: Dawn McNamara

CONCLUSION

We really hope that our enthusiasm, as well as that of the other artists we've spoken to about touring work to people in their homes, has rubbed off. Solving all the challenges is so rewarding, and taking art, unfiltered and live to people homes and communities, feels like it is in the very best traditions of outdoor arts.

We are realistic in that much of our sector will return to what it was before Covid, but we dearly hope that we can keep this beautiful thread of work running into the future.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Stellar Projects and Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council for commissioning MAW; ACE for supporting creation, and the time to draw this resource together; Luan Taylor for her editing skills, and Catherine Packard at OAUk for bringing it to completion.

Thank you again to the artists and organisations that have inspired us directly and spent time talking about Neighbourhood Work for this document: Sammi Gabb; Justine Squires (Corvus Angelicus); Matt Pang (The Happy Heart Bike); Musical Ruth (Circo Rum Ba Ba); Stella Hall (Festival of Thrift); Kat Boon (Appetite Stoke); Hobbit (Can't Sit Still and Stuff and Nonsense); Dan Fox (Sound Intervention); Jude Jagger (Quays Culture), and Barra Collins (LAsTheatre).

Finally, we would love to hear from you about how your experiences, challenges and solutions differed from ours, feel free to contact mail@pif-paf.co.uk.



Supported using public funding by
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