

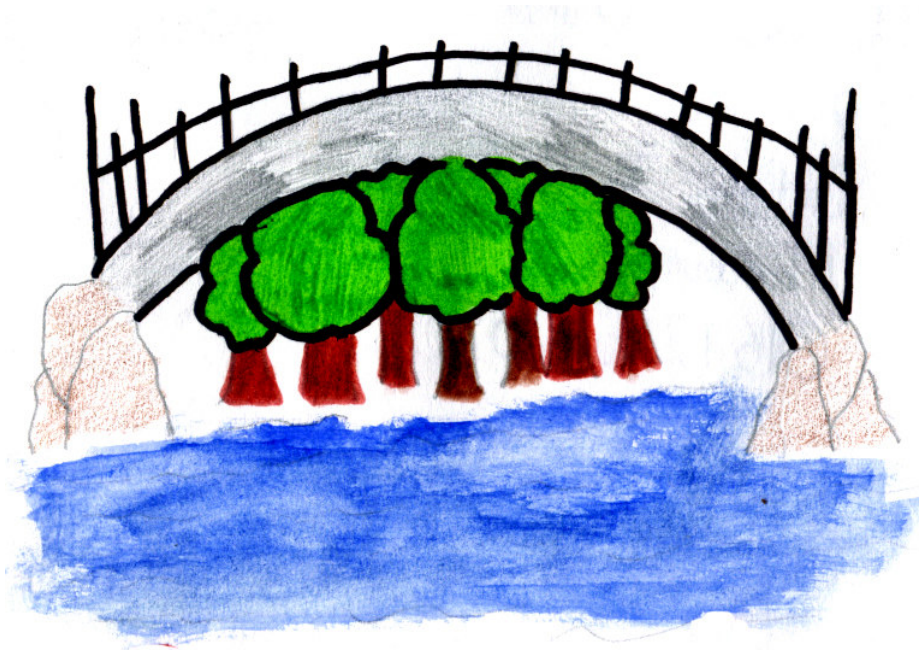
riverbank



# Reclaim Our River

2006-2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY of the recommendations from the evaluation report of the Kennet Valley Arts Trust and Action for the River Kennet project, funded by National Lottery People's Millions.



Report by



secret agent marketing  
POTENTIAL UNCOVERED

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## Evaluation overview

This evaluates Kennet Valley Arts Trust's involvement in Reclaim Our River and how it worked in partnership with a community group, specifically Action for the River Kennet.

The project is an exciting and inspiring community arts partnership that benefits the local Marlborough community in the widest sense – both in a long-lasting physical legacy and in actively involving the local community in achieving this aim.

It shows how the arts can have a practical application in everyday life. It demonstrates how the arts and river have an important part to play in the wider community environment: physical, emotional and economic.

## Project overview

Overall funding:	£56,212	(People's Millions)
	£1,387	(Ernest Cook Trust)
	£1,000	(Marlborough Area Development Trust)
	£10,175	(in-kind so far)
<i>Total</i>	<i>£68,774</i>	

Reclaim Our River was inspired by the desire to work in partnership with another Marlborough area community group and the possibility of a National Lottery grant to make this happen.

The project began March 2006, with Kennet Valley Arts Trust and Action for the River Kennet.

The aims were to promote KVAT and the Riverbank arts centre project, and to restore and improve awareness of Marlborough's river, to gain access to each others user groups and to inspire future projects in the town. (Please see Appendices for complete aims).

The final project consisted of the following activities:

- Restoration of the Priory Gardens' bank of the River Kennet
- Improvements to the riverside environment of Priory Gardens such as redesigned and replanted riverbanks, new outdoor furniture, gate and fence
- Reclaim Our River arts and environment festival
- A series of workshops for local schools, culminating in Reclaim Our River arts and environment exhibition
- Reclaim Our River writing workshops for adults
- Riverside information panels

## Supportive Research

ARK's involvement has a strong foundation from the community via community groups and spokespeople, and KVAT's involvement would have benefited from a similar representation from the community. Currently the rationale behind using the arts via KVAT mainly comes from funders and individual project manager's strengths.

More public consultation (which could happen after the main plans are drawn up to cater for deadlines on funding bids) possibly would have strengthened the arts aims and objectives, better integrated it into the project as a whole, and informed the planning for individual events.

Public consultation does not have to be a lengthy and expensive process. It could be as simple as taking notes of meetings with KVAT and ARK volunteers, community groups, spokespeople and traders.

## Winning the People's Millions vote

### Evaluation measurements

- Winning funding
- Heightened awareness with town traders and townspeople, through one-to-one conversations
- Level of partnership working between ARK/KVAT and other community groups/people
- Coverage by local media



*Winning night  
Credit: Peter Davison*

People's Millions is a National Lottery initiative: community organisations put in a bid for a project and the short-listed go through to a head-to-head vote. About 10 projects each receive 50,000.

The kick off for Reclaim Our River was excellent: the coverage from local media, the enthusiasm and support and the partnership working between ARK and KVAT was extremely successful.

Up against a Yate sports ground project, Marlborough were the under dogs in terms of population numbers – 20,000+ versus 8,000. However the public were galvanised through focussed media coverage, direct mail, emailing, texting and leafleting to gain those crucial votes, winning with 2,200 votes – equal to a quarter of Marlborough's population.

The ITV West coverage that was part of the People's Millions process was an excellent boost to both ARK and KVAT.

The main issue after the vote was won was keeping the momentum of the project whilst it was being organised. Except for the river restoration and excellent coverage after each event, the local paper did not publicise, in advance, the activities the public could participate in. In addition the connection between what the public voted for and the fulfilment of the vote was not implicit.

A recommendation is that for a similar project, the Gazette is approached (and possibly BBC Radio Wilts to acknowledge their support) as a media sponsor to secure preview coverage throughout.

## River Restoration

NB The effectiveness of ARK's river restoration is not within the remit of this evaluation.

Budget: £41,610

### Description

There were five planned opportunities for public volunteers (plus school involvement) to help with the river restoration, May Wednesdays 11am-3pm and at the Reclaim Our River Festival. This included rubbish and tree removal, building up of banks and planting. ARK and BTCV leaders managed the process.

### Recommendations

- A well-prepared relationship with potential volunteers pays dividends.
- Re-run the final planting day on a week-end day to encourage the widest possible involvement.
- Promotional materials and PR should have, as standard, a short sentence clarifying the project's aim and the involvement of project partners.
- Better quality, more eye-catching print may encourage a wider reading and therefore a greater awareness of the project. To fulfil the Disability Discrimination Act the text should be at least 12 point.



*Charlotte Hitchmough and Val Compton of ARK  
Credit: Anna Sexton*

## School Workshops

Budget: £5,631

In detail: £2,774 People's Millions  
£1,200 in kind support  
£1,387 Ernest Cook Trust

### Description

KVAT/ARK recruited and contracted a local professional artist (James Aldridge), experienced in working in community arts and environment projects, to devise and implement workshops with three local primary schools – St Peter's, St Mary's and Preshute, during June and July.

The workshops were tailored to each school's requirement, each with a different outcome, and a contract exchanged with each school.

The work created was showcased in a public exhibition at St Peter's School, 13 & 14 July 2007.



*St Mary's School 'nest'  
Credit: James Aldridge*

### Recommendations

- Clearly and non-jargon written contracts (or agreements) are an excellent method of helping partners know what is expected on both sides, and help keep the project on track.
- Include specified joint promotion of project results for public consumption (in this case the exhibition) as part of the contract between partners, so each side knows what is expected of them.
- Tailoring educational (or any other) projects to school's requirements bring excellent results and are the most useful to schools.
- Projects which provide paid-for project planning and leading are always appreciated! School budgets are usually tight, but they appreciate the benefits of such projects to build the creative skills of children and teachers.
- James felt the smaller group sizes – such as at St Mary's – worked most effectively, and this would be the ideal. This would be accompanied by the teacher/s shadowing the work so new skills and methodology could be shared with the rest of the class, and potentially the school. James's work methods and materials inspired participating teachers to use these in their own teaching.
- The school's participating teachers visited the exhibition, but of the headteachers, only St Peters attended. A personal invite or VIP list may have encouraged this participation.

- Press releases and photos can help get coverage, and the right message about a project. Media sponsorship, and arranging preview pictures, with the local paper may help preview coverage.
- Professional promotional print is a powerful tool in engendering a feeling of value to the project for children, school and families.

# Adult Writing Workshops

Budget: £850

## Description

Four free open sessions (Thursday evenings in June/July) for adults run by local professional author Jon Cannon.

They were to use the river as a stimulus for ‘writing that marks the connections between people, their lives, and the places in which they live.’

The resulting work was to be inscribed on the new Priory Gardens furniture.

## Recommendations

Although there was no uptake, trialling these workshops can be seen as a useful market test to gauge interest, and led to the outcome of a writers’ group.

### *Late confirmation*

The workshops were confirmed at the end of May that did not allow for much pre-publicity such as press or quality promotional materials.

### *Timing*

June/July is a tricky time to have a series of workshops – there is a lot of competition from holidays and Marlborough Summer School.

### *Generating an audience*

Writing workshops require a degree of involvement and commitment which requires a different approach to promoting a show. Perhaps a more successful method would have been to approach people with a prior interest (such as a book group or through Swindon Literature Festival) or a community group who may be interested in attending as a group (such as from ARK) as a sociable activity. The workshops could still have been promoted as open to the general public.

Perhaps also a bit of simple market research could have been done; such as approaching a community group and asked what river-related arts activity they would like to do.

### *Pricing*

Although making something free makes it affordable to all, it does not necessarily remove barriers to attendance. Free things can be perceived as low quality – ‘you get what you pay for’ – and in Marlborough research has shown that people tend to be money rich and time poor.



*Riverbank Writers: Gwyenth Bell,  
Michael Cope, Anne Tucker  
Credit: Louisa Davison*

# Reclaim Our River Festival

Budget:	£3,027	
Allocation:	£1,400	Festival organisation
	£500	PR
	£627	Promotional print
	£300	Materials/refreshments
	£200	Venue Hire



## Description

A day of arts and environmental river-themed stalls, exhibitions and workshops for the whole family, held 11am-5pm Saturday 28 July, Priory Gardens. A mixture of artists, environmental and local traders stalls.

## Recommendations

### Evaluation

Unobtrusive methods of evaluation would have to be considered for a public event such as this, that does not easily collect customer details. An example is asking simple questions in a show of hands before an activity eg 'how many had drummed before?'

A steward could be charged with counting attendance and noting ages, etc at various points in the day and for different activities.

Activities that collected customer details – such as the balloon race or a raffle – could be used to do post customer questionnaires.

### Activities and participation

The balance of activities – stalls to browse, activities to take part in and performances to listen to - seemed to hit the right note, there just needed to be more of them.

A wide mix of people and family audiences – who gave a friendly and warm reception to the festival participants – visited. This is potentially very attractive to funders and sponsors.

The warm reception from audiences and the appreciation from Gwen and Flying Pizza suggest this has potential to develop in future years, particularly with the right marketing support offered. This could include a more organised feedback mechanism, publicity and information about the performances/performers involved. Like a mini-Edinburgh Fringe but with more quality control and aimed at arts-development.

In the project aims, a definition of 'local,' and more specific audience types, numbers and a quality of experience anticipated would have helped marketing planning and evaluation.

A visual arts presence was lacking (although it should be noted that visual arts groups were approached). This may be an opportunity to create a river-inspired temporary arts installation in Priory Gardens to be created/finished on the day. James Aldridge suggested

*Rhythmworks  
Credit: Wilts Gazette & Herald*

that the children's work could have been more comprehensively exhibited at the festival, but this would take extra time and materials for a proper outdoor installation than was allocated in the original budget.

### **Organisation**

A larger budget is needed, at least £10,000, to cover marketing, festival manager and pay workshop leaders and performers, and power (ie electricity).

More forward planning was necessary to offset consent for use of gardens, booking of stall holders, workshop leaders and performers.

The festival proved to be a large job, above and beyond the initial project brief and needed a separate marketing/organisation plan and possibly a festival manager responsible for the day-to-day organisation. As the project drew on, it became apparent that it, and particularly the festival, needed more than the two days a week allotted to it.

Food/drink are an essential component of a festival. A future event could hire people experienced in outdoor food catering and have a budget that covers power generation.

Greater stall holder, etc uptake could be improved by the following:

- More stall holders may make illness dropouts less of an issue.
- Confirming stall holders much earlier (they were not confirmed until mid-June). This was due to a town council letter of confirmation of the use of Priory Gardens arriving 18 June; the organiser did not want to rely on verbal confirmation.
- As a first time festival with a minimal budget, it has yet to prove itself as a worthwhile event in which to take part. Particularly in July there is a lot of competition for this kind of event, and feedback from stall holders suggest there is festival and fair fatigue. The warm reception of this festival should mean that a second one, as remarked by a stall holder, would attract more participation.  
More forward planning – getting stall holders booked a long way in advance so it is confirmed before other festivals are booked.  
Consider a time with less competition or run in conjunction with an existing event such as Marlborough Town and Country Fair or Jazz Festival.
- Consider the way deposits or fees are charged: the cost of deposit (although refundable) - £150 – was perceived to be high for this kind of event, whilst other festivals or fayres charge fees for participation.  
More research into charges that other festivals make. Forward planning means that deposit or fee deadlines are final and cuts out indecisiveness and last minute dropouts and allows time for mentoring.
- Some organisational requirements appeared to be off-putting, particularly for the inexperienced (such as public liability insurance of £5,000,000, and a long contract) This was mostly due to the strict regulations surrounding the use of the gardens – it was essential that they were left in good condition.  
Consider more time for hand-holding to minimise the impact of such requirements. Make the contract more user-friendly.
- Some artists who were approached to hold workshops were inexperienced in this area and got cold feet.  
Build on the mixture of experienced and inexperienced workshop leaders. From the feedback meeting it seemed a core value was that local artists would be supported to develop their skills – a mentor and/or skills pack may help.

- Workshop leaders were offered expenses, but were not paid – they were expected to charge for their service. This meant paying work can take precedence over the festival, an unknown income quality.  
Pay workshop leaders, but KVAT keeps some or all fees charged to the public.
- Talk to more festival organisers to find out how they resolve these issues.
- Discuss these possible solutions with this year's stall holders and those who dropped out to see if this would make participation more attractive.

## **Signage**

Verbal announcers, and on day promoters (eg flyering) needed to be more clearly briefed with a simple written promotional message about the event.

Planning permission willing, a banner could be hung across the Priory Home's entrance, to clarify the entry point and to draw High Street passers by.

Festival running orders (stuck to trees) were useful to visitors but were easily missed. More visible and stand alone A-boards with a map, timings of activities and directions to activities outside the main area would be clearer for visitors.

Signage for activities would also help visitor awareness.

The whole festival needs to proclaim its nature - such with as on-site banners and large posters - so it doesn't appear a collection of stalls and activities to the casual observer, as per feedback from participants and visitors.

## **Stewardship**

Review recruitment, retention and effectiveness of volunteers.

Considered whether it is necessary to hire at least some experienced stewards, or develop a stewardship training course.

## **Price**

A free event was a popular choice, particularly with stall holders, however, more research may be useful to investigate the pros and cons of free versus paid entry, and prices of activities, stall holder pitches, person-power etc.

## **Branding**

A clearly branded event helps attract audiences and defines the activities within it. A mission statement for the festival would clarify the meaning of arts and environment; specific aims and a plan would define the types of activity needed to maintain the festival identity.

The relationship of the festival to the river seemed to have been lost. ARK seemed a bit out on a limb (they were, logically, next to the river but this meant they were set apart from the rest of the festival). In the spirit of the partnership, and using the arts to bring life to the environmental issues, an arts workshop or some arts activity based on ARK's stand may link the festival with the river appreciation and restoration.

Hands-on activities, performance (especially noisy ones) create atmosphere and help retain visitors.

Every part of the festival needs to fit into the values that 'arts and environment' suggests – eco-friendly printed promotional materials and recycling at the festival are excellent examples of this.

## **Venue**

Priory Gardens is a beautiful setting for a festival and close enough to High Street to draw passing trade. However there are certain health, safety and practical issues which may be resolved by a closer relationship with those responsible at the town council.

A £350 bond was required by the council to offset any damage, which means there was shared responsibility of the site with festival and stall holders.

The use of the gardens raise awareness of their availability to the general public. Perhaps general information about it (such as on an information board or in festival publicity) would increase awareness even more.

## **Promotion**

High quality print is essential to give the impression of a quality event and stand out amongst other promotion print. The design and high quality print of the festival had a far better reception when given out to the public than black and white photocopied leaflets.

Professional PR and an excellent relationship with the local journalist gets a certain amount of coverage, but a closer relationship with the overall paper – such as negotiated media sponsorship - is necessary to secure preview coverage with the the main local paper, the Gazette and Herald.

A different timing of the festival or working with a pre-existing event may help coverage in the popular news and event time of July.

A review of KVAT's rural network is necessary: who is part of it, how active they are, where they distribute and how more can be recruited and kept motivated.

Consider street banners early on in planning. It is an excellent publicity tool for raising awareness of town centre visitors, especially for an event that would benefit from passing trade. They contribute to a celebratory feel and lend the event importance. Banners are, unfortunately, expensive and often require planning permission (Marlborough Chamber of Commerce own banner poles in High Street), requiring this to be something organised early on in the proceedings.

A widely used tool by festivals and outdoor events by country fairs is an advance timetable of events (such as in a promotional leaflet, website or through the local paper). This highlights to the general public the attractions on offer and in planning their visit. As part of the aims is to enable a greater awareness of the gardens, then it would make sense to include a location map, and possibly information about the gardens. As one stall holder said: "I come to Marlborough all the time and I was not aware of the gardens."

To attract tourists to a festival such as this, a budget that bears the additional cost of regional advertising needs to be borne. In future aims and objectives, it would need to be considered whether it is achievable to attract tourists other than those already in Marlborough, or in nearby towns. Promotional material was concentrated in Marlborough and villages for this festival. A definition of 'tourist' and 'local' in the aims would clarify this.

A current website is essential for any event with over 50% of people with access to the internet. It also means last minute updates to events and projects can be made available to the project. The blog could be incorporated into [www.riverbank.org.uk](http://www.riverbank.org.uk) to minimise confusion over web address details. The website needs an urgent review regarding its compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act, codes of good web practice and the ease in which it is updated. There are straightforward ready-to-use web design packages (such as Rapidweaver) that would help this process considerably.

More collection of KVAT supporter emails would make the most of tight budgets and enable last minute news and reminders.

## Project – management and partnership working

- The aims and objectives helped keep the project on track and create an identity and mission for each part. For evaluation purposes to gauge the success of the project, learn lessons for the future and encourage future funding, SMART aims are needed: for example: ‘increase local people’s chance to participate...’: how many, who, for how long?
- It is also important to identify the parts of the project that will fulfil aims, and then communicate this, and the relationship with partners ie ARK, explicitly to workshop leaders as part of their contract.
- Be clear about short and long-term aims, to help realism over the immediate impact of the project and signal potential future initiatives.
- Base aims on solid research.
- Agree project aims and objectives at board level to show how it fulfils KVAT organisational aims and objectives.
- A paid project manager is essential for the success of the scale of a project such as this.
- Include a named KVAT line manager in the contract to provide support with management challenges and issues.
- Give feedback to the National Lottery regarding the benefits of a closer working relationship and a less bureaucratic budget-changing process.

## Project Marketing

Much of this has been covered in sections related to activities.

The milestones given to the People's Millions as part of the project bid was a clear timetabled plan of action. However this included strategic, tactical, operational and marketing tasks. A marketing plan would have made the necessary link between the overall aims and the communication of those aims.

Part of the branding was a logo competition aimed at primary schools. This encouraged engagement with the project beyond the schools involved with the workshops. The winner was decided by ARK, KVAT and the MRRS boards and was excited to have won. It cannot be underestimated the feeling of achievement for a school child to see their work in print, and to be judged the best.

## Improvement to the Priory Gardens riverside area

Budget: £41,611

Allocation: see appendix

The project aims to install a new bench and information panels. Feedback from Marlborough Town Council meant the additions of new gate and fencing.

Currently, Priory Gardens has a old bench and table set, temporary-looking fence to cover the area between wall and adjoining carpark and a weathered gate from the bridge.



*Ray Wirick trout furniture*

By upgrading the rather sad looking garden furniture the project aims to a deflect a 'broken window'\* effect; if the garden looks cared for, then this should inspire a more respectful use.

The new bench is a commission from local artist Raymond Wirick, who has an impressive resumé ([www.mstudiogallery.net](http://www.mstudiogallery.net)). The final 'trout' design was decided by KVAT board, ARK members, MRSS, Marlborough Town Council and the general public. Also mooted was showing the options at the festival, however time ran out for this option.

Planning permission for bench, fence and gate was granted mid-August 2007.

Information panels - which describe the project, explain the improvements that have taken place, and increase awareness of the river - aim to be in place early 2008.

\*"The 'broken window' theory states that something as small and innocuous as a broken window does in fact send a signal to those who pass by every day. If it is left broken, the owner of the building isn't paying attention or doesn't care. That means more serious infractions- theft, defacement, violent crime- might be condoned in this area as well. At best, it signals that no one is watching." <http://www.brokenwindows.com/introduction.html>

## Project Legacy

### **More river restoration**

ARK has already had an agreement from Kennet District Council that the opposite bank of the River Kennet (for which they, rather than Marlborough Town Council, are responsible) will be restored.

### **More support for KVAT**

Armadillo Café were inspired to hold blind icecream tastings in aid of Riverbank.

### **Writers' Group**

Although there was a no show for the creative writing workshops, 7 people expressed an interest in a writer's group after the event. The first meeting took place mid-September. See [riverbankwriters.wordpress.com](http://riverbankwriters.wordpress.com)

### **New festival**

We Love Marlborough is a new festival, supported by KVAT and created by Reclaim Our River organiser and Secret Agent Marketing, which aims to build on the success of the festival, work with existing July event organisers and continue the nurturing process of local artists and arts initiatives.

### **Jazz Festival and St John's School**

St John's School took part in the Jazz Festival, from a recommendation coming out of Reclaim Our River discussions.

### **Helped Marlborough Town Council achieving quality mark**

Working with KVAT meant the Town Council had worked in partnership on an arts project, a crucial element to gaining their quality mark.

### **New sustainable arts development agency**

The success of the project has enabled Anna Sexton to set up this new initiative.

### **Better relationships with other arts and community groups**

Working together collaboratively on Reclaim Our River has developed relationships and opened doors with KVAT and other local groups.

## Future projects

These are suggestions made by all included in the project.

### **Schools**

All the schools who took part in the exhibition are enthusiastic to work with KVAT and James Aldridge again. Future ideas include an arts skills mentoring programme for teachers.

A follow up programme could be drawn up which enables schools (and the Children's Centre opposite Priory Gardens) to work with ARK to maintain a lasting interest in environmental and river issues as the children grow up.

To fulfil the aims related to a greater appreciation of the area and decrease drug and alcohol abuse and graffiti, work with potentially St John's School, Marlborough College, Marlborough Youth Development Centre, ARK, Youth Offending Team on an appropriate programme aimed at older children and teenagers.

### **BTCV**

This organisation expressed an interest in arts activities that would fit into their environment remit, especially for their Wild West project.

There is also the potential for inter-generational work, eg families work on conservation projects that become arts projects.

### **Marlborough Town Council**

Make more use of Priory Gardens as an outdoor performance venue.

The council workers responsible for Priory Gardens will also be briefed on how to maintain the new furniture.

They were also motivated to open their archives to the public.

### **Sculpture Trail**

The information panels and bespoke Priory Garden furniture could form part of a sculpture trail along the riverbank. This could be a partnership project with KVAT, ARK, Marlborough Town Council and local artists and potential funders.

### **Skill-sharing project**

Nurture a potential new audience/customer from a project that pairs people with practical skills with artists, such as builders with sculptors. This could form part of the sculpture trail or could be used on a community project working with a new partner.

### **Artist mentoring**

The success of the skills sharing with teachers, anecdotal evidence from artists, and lack of confidence in running workshops at the festival suggests that a programme of shadowing and mentoring may be beneficial. This does not have to be a stand alone project, but could run alongside workshops as when using experienced workshop leaders.

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