

The Croydon Arts Debate

Chaired By Professor Lord Richard Harries of Pentregrath

10th October 2013 at Croydon Unitarian Church

Photographs of the meeting can be found on Facebook: <http://bit.ly/Croydonartsdebate-pix>

Meeting Summary

There is support for a group to organise Croydon Arts with particular focus on:

- *Long-term development;*
- *Coordinating the way forward;*
- *Sharing of resources, such as marketing and communication;*
- *Being an umbrella for arts organisations and activities in Croydon.*

There are 15-20 volunteers for the committee which should be an open working group that identifies the way forward.

Meeting Key Points

1. Croydon has much to celebrate in the Arts, especially the heritage of the two Elizabethan periods. Elizabeth I and Whitgift, which led to the establishment of curriculum for training the English clergy – an education system that trained Shakespeare and Marlow; the Book of Common Prayer; and the King James Bible – some of the finest examples of English literature were a result of the actions of Whitgift. Elizabeth II and the arrival of immigrants from the Commonwealth and Europe – we should celebrate Croydon's key role; centre of the Home Office and the centre of such fabulous diversity. Charlotte Davies, Chair, SCCA

2. The development of the performing arts is seriously under threat in both education and the wider world so the efforts and commitment from voluntary organisations is essential and if we are able to pool the resources of several like-minded organisations the effect can only be heightened within education circles and the wider community. Evette Davies, speaking on behalf of Richard Deering, Chair of Croydon Music Festival.

3. The Chairman of the Royal Society of Arts, Vikki Heywood, a former director of the Royal Shakespeare Company had on 9 October 2013 urged "the Government and the public to... be examining how arts and heritage organisations can enable places not only to survive but to prosper in these difficult times... We need to make sure that we are helping to support our local communities." It was suggested that people read the full speech (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/10365294/Ministers-believe-arts-not-valuable-says-Royal-Society-of-Arts-chairman.html>). Dr Jean Gooding MBE

4. Croydon has buildings but really needs a buzz. There is no vision. Arts can contribute so much to an area. Reference was made to the George Town University research papers on

“The Role of the Arts and Culture in Planning Practice”

<http://www.planning.org/research/arts/briefingpapers/overview.htm>.

The Arts:

- strengthen cultural values and preserve heritage and history
- build community character and sense of place
- enhance community engagement and participation
- enhance economic vitality.

Bex de Paula Hanika

5. Living in Croydon has to mean more than just cheap housing. I chose to live in Croydon because it was becoming vibrant again with the Picasso Exhibition, and the Clock Tower and the Warehouse Theatre and so many other facilities; but now so much has gone; the Council do not realise what they have lost. For example, few valued the Arthur Davidson Concerts and when recently they came to an end after decades, nobody was there to mark the occasion and express any gratitude. Judith Clingan

6. The loss of the Riesco Collection and forced resignation from the Museum Association has caused long-term damage to Croydon. We will never again be able to hire exhibitions like the Picasso Exhibition. It will be hard for Croydon to gain support for culture from Arts Associations and other bodies. Long term damage has been done. Debbie Challis, Stanley People's Initiative

7. There is a need for some local organisation that will offer: leadership; communication, including marketing and promotion; meeting places; casual Arts opportunities/community events. Gemma Coldicott, SLiDE.

8. There is a need for some organisation to lead on finding spaces for visual Arts - empty spaces which are free or very cheap. Gordon Ross, Art & Design Now.

9. We seem to have lost some really important outreach officers from the Clock Tower; the Council Arts has become too dominated by administration. What is happening at the Clock Tower? Inspiral Community Artists

10. There is nothing to see in Croydon I always have to go elsewhere – Hackney has 3 international Arts venues. Anna, Croydon resident.

11. Arts is badly served in Croydon and not properly funded; The Riesco Collection sale could probably be stopped if someone could mount a judicial review – the Council have breached their own codes as well as the Museum Association ethical code and not consulted properly. Councillor Tim Godfrey

12. An Arts Festival is useful for highlighting what is going on and getting people involved. Thornton Heath Arts Festival is all about making a lot of noise about what is happening and

then reminding people that this is all going on every week and they can join in. Karen Barnett, Thornton Heath Arts Festival Organiser.

14. Fairfield Halls has passed its useful life it is too big and should be replaced by a smaller theatre in the current Queen's Gardens. Graham Lomas.

15. Parts of the Riesco Collection have been sold off several times over the years; many pieces are unaccounted for and missing but the Police have not been informed. Originally there were 650 pieces, now there are only 206 pieces remaining. Paul Sohan.

13. The majority of the meeting voted for something to happen in July 2014 to provide a sharper Arts focus, but it was not a unanimous decision.