Public art for Block F facade wall

June 2019
Introduction

An experienced artist is being sought to deliver a public art project at Edward Street Quarter – a large new building development, of mixed-use, about to commence construction in Brighton. We are seeking an artist to create a meaningful interpretative design on a west-facing facade brick wall. The following pages outline the project scope with a choice of artistic briefs that have been informed by stakeholder and community engagement to which your submission should respond to.
Brief history of the site and area

The Edward Street Quarter site was most recently the home of Amex House, popularly nicknamed The Wedding Cake, the former European headquarters of American Express. The site is located in the Carlton Hill area and runs alongside Edward Street.

Development of the wider Carlton Hill area started from the beginning of the 19th century and progressed rapidly. By 1840 this mixture of mainly artisan housing, workshops and pubs was identified as one of the poorest and most densely populated parts of Brighton. To the north of what is now Sussex Street, it was largely undeveloped farmland and remained so until after the 1930s.

Brighton Corporation undertook some slum clearance in the 1880s, when White and Blaker Streets were laid out between Carlton Hill and Edward Street.

Around this time, Carlton Hill was known as Brighton’s ‘foreign quarter’, where many Italian and French street vendors, who sold various types of food around Brighton, lived.

Brighton’s origins lie in the Saxon fishing and agricultural village of Brighthelmstone (the ‘old’ name for Brighton) and its fishing industry still thrived into the early 20th century. The fishing community, known colloquially as ‘fisher-folk’, lived in the Carlton Hill area and used its workshops and warehouses to cure and smoke their herring catches. A contemporary writer, quoted by Brighton historian Clifford Musgrave, observed that “an aromatic and appetising pall would envelop the entire neighbourhood, kippering both fish and residents alike”.

A former farmhouse dating from the early 19th century remains as the property known as 34/35 Mighell Street. Landowner Philip Mighell owned a significant amount of land and late 18th century maps show a large area called Mighell’s Field to the north of what is now Sussex Street and it is possible that the farmhouse was associated with that land.

Both the artists John Constable and William Turner spent time living in the area while producing sketches and works of Brighton and its landscapes.

A more extensive programme of slum clearance began in 1928 until the start of World War II and the cleared land around Carlton Hill was redeveloped largely as blocks of flats such as Kingswood (1938) and Milner (1936) and later as wider rows of houses, such as those on the Tarner estate to the north and east. The demolition of these streets also caused roads to be widened.

American Express opened a mechanical accounting centre in a building on Edward Street in 1968. In the mid-1970’s it acquired the land to build Amex House. Most of Mighell Street and all of its buildings – except the old farmhouse – and some neighbouring streets were demolished and replaced by the 300,000-square-foot building. A legislative order was raised by the Secretary of State for the Environment in mid-1973 to allow Mighell Street to be severed. In 2008, American Express announced plans to demolish the building and to replace it on another site which was granted in 2009. The work was completed in 2012 and the old Amex House was demolished in 2017.
About the tender

We are seeking an experienced artist to work with us to produce an artwork to be installed on the west-facing Block F facade wall of the new development.

Situated on the boundary of Edward Street, the wall and artwork will be facing down the hill on Edward Street towards the Royal Pavilion.

Because of its prominence the artwork will need to be appropriate and sensitive to the location and we are looking for something that has narrative meaning to the area. To help in this process we have written three briefs (following this page) from which you can choose one or more options to help inform the theme of your submission.

The facade wall will be made and finished as brickwork and the winning tender will be complementary to the form and nature of the material. You will be expected to work closely with the design and construction team during the process and will be expected to meet important deadlines.

Drawings for the site and building can be found on the following pages. Please note that the brickwork visualisations are currently indicative and the winning artist maybe able to influence the final layout.

The budget, which includes materials (beyond the brick) is £38,000 and working closely with the design and construction team could be maximised by considering how the design will work with current construction costs. It is important that the final artwork is sustainable, robust and of low or no maintenance.

This first round of calls is an invitation to express your interest for the project and will be assessed by the project public art steering group – which will include, although not limited to – representatives from developers First Base, McClaren (construction), Brighton & Hove Council (arts, planning and community officers), arts organisations, members from the local community and Richard Wolfstrome (local designer and artist).

At this stage you are not expected to deliver final designs. We are looking for indicative ideas, based on one of the project briefs; a rationale, how you would approach the project, thoughts on materials, and to demonstrate a relevant portfolio of previous work and experience.

The steering group will short-list four submissions, based on the artist’s initial thoughts, along with a proven track-record and portfolio, who will then be invited to develop their idea further and present to the panel on Wednesday 21 August 2019. There will be a fee of £500 for each short-listed artist for this stage.

Please note that all short-listed submissions will be used for publicity and may appear on the site hoardings with the understanding that the unsuccessful short-listed submissions will retain their intellectual property with the artist. The successful submission will be expected to hand-over rights of the artwork to First Base when complete and fully paid for.

All unsuccessful submissions for this first stage will be informed soon after the first round and the short-list selection has been made.

Expressions of interest should be emailed, by Thursday 4 July, 12 noon, to Richard Wolfstrome at howl@wolfi.co.uk.
The schedule

1. Expressions of interest to be returned by Thu 4 July 2019 – 12 noon
2. Short-list candidates informed by Fri 12 July 2019
3. Short-list presentations Wed 21 August 2019
4. Selected artist informed by Wed 28 August 2019
5. Artwork installed around Summer 2020

1. Expression of interest
   Following one of the artistic briefs to respond with indicative idea, rationale, how you would approach the project, thoughts on materials, and to demonstrate a portfolio of previous work and experience.

3. Short-listed
   Develop your idea further and attend interview to present approach and design/art visuals. Fee of £500 per short-listed artist.
The narrative briefs

The following three briefs have been informed by stakeholder and community engagements. Please select one of the subjects and respond as requested. You are welcome to submit more than one idea. Equally, should you be familiar with the area and have some insight on a subject that you feel would work well for this project, we are open to such a response, although please do include a good rationale to accompany such a submission.

William Turner was here

During the 1820’s Turner spent time in the area making paintings and drawings around the town. Turner’s studies of cloud, sea around the edge-lands of Brighton were described as ‘nothing’, although he won the commission for a 6ft painting at Petworth House which showed the Chain Pier in Brighton from the sea [https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-brighton-from-the-sea-t03886]. Using Turner as an influence this commission will seek to be influenced by the impressionist nature and style for which Turner was well-known – not to copy or replicate – something modern and contemporary that gives a ‘nod’ to Turner.

The return of Mighell Street

There is some debate on the correct pronunciation of Mighell – ‘my-all’ or ‘mig-ell’. Named after Philip Mighell who was a local landowner at the end of the 18th century the street was mostly demolished to make way for Amex House in Edward Street. Only an early-nineteenth-century grade II listed farmhouse now divided into two dwellings remains. It was previously the location for a spiritualist church and the Black Lion pub. We would like you to respond to this brief with the celebration of the return of Mighell Street. It maybe something that speaks of celebration, of loss and return and/or the nature of language and nomenclature.

Fishing and the ‘fisher-folk’

“It’s not a living, it’s a way of life. They say that salt gets in your blood, I really think it does”. The Tarner area was home to the community known as the ‘fisher-folk’. Far removed from being a comfortable life-style choice the fishing community was one of hardship and tenacity. Fishing in Brighton goes back to Saxon times and in the 17th century it was economically the most dominant industry in the town. The response to this brief will celebrate the fishing heritage of Brighton and the Tarner region. A good resource and rare local social history book is worth seeking out: Catching Stories: Voices from the Brighton Fishing Community.
Plan drawings and visuals
Plan drawings and visuals

Please note that the brickwork visualisations are currently indicative and the winning artist may be able to influence the final layout.
Finally a reminder...

Please respond with your expressions of interest by email, by Thursday 4 July 2019, 12 noon.

Files no larger than 20Mb (or send a downloadable link) should be sent to Richard Wolfstrome at howl@wolfi.co.uk.

If you have any questions or would like clarity on any part of this brief please contact Richard at the same email address – howl@wolfi.co.uk.