



Urban Room Folkestone

Location:

1 The Plaza, Folkestone.

Run by:

Founded by Diane Dever, now operated by The Urban Room Folkestone Association (URFA).

Commissioned by:

Originally commissioned by the 2017 Creative Folkestone Triennial.

Date:

2017 to present.

Timing:

Originally temporary for the 2017 Triennial, now permanent in our new location.

Space:

In a former tourist information office in the heart of the harbour/old town/ Creative Quarter

Description:

UR Folkestone is a space for civic discussions about the town and wider societal/global topics such as climate change. UR Folkestone sits in an area which has seen significant arts-led investment and development by a wealthy local businessman and the charity he established, Creative Folkestone, who are a key partner. UR Folkestone works in dialogue with decision makers. Folkestone Fringe (a local arts organisation) manage the space and curate the programme. They use urban arts led strategies to engage people in conversation and activity that focused attention on placemaking that is beneficial to all. The newly-expanded Urban Room Folkestone Association acts as a de-facto board to guide UR Folkestone activity.



Image:

UR Folkestone

Credit: Igor Emmerich

Aims of the UR:

The aim of URF is to develop the general population's understanding of Folkestone's urban environment and from this basis host discussions about the future of the town. The ideas of 'civicness' and citizenship are crucial to our work, encouraging people to bring their skills and ideas for the wider benefit of the town. Central to our work is the idea of URF as a neutral space, not beholden to any one stakeholder, and also as a safe space to share thoughts and feelings about the town. We are open to the public five days a week and all are welcome. We actively encourage others to use the space to host meetings, for events and exhibitions that are in some way 'civic'.

How was the UR funded and resourced?

Originally funded by the Triennial. Subsequently privately funded and staffed by two individuals who set up the URFA. Some ad-hoc funding from Creative Folkestone, District Council, Town Council. Where specific events/programmes are delivered by Folkestone Fringe this is often funded by the Arts Council, Town Council and in the past the EU via the Creative Europe programme.

Activities of the UR:

URF hosts a permanent exhibition of the Urban Analysis, a geographical and historical analysis of the town, showing its development from 10,000BC-Present. We also host an Urban Library. Our exhibition space hosts work by others that in some way relates to the town, recent exhibitions have been art, history, geography and climate-focused. When exhibitions begin or end we hold 'civic lunches' bringing local people and key stakeholders together to discuss themes relating to the exhibition, 'breaking bread' and discussing topics over a meal are a key way we bring people together. Each year Folkestone Fringe delivers 'The Festival of Looking' which focuses on urbanism and for which URF is the focal point. Folkestone Fringe are well networked and support our activity with marketing.

**Image:**

UR Folkestone

Credit: Igor Emmerich

We want visitors to the urban room to feel relaxed and unpressured, to feel comfortable to share their thoughts and feelings. All discussions must be civil, we actively discourage excessive confrontation, interrupting, raised voices, etc. We are open to all and through encouraging others to use the space, we hope to engage audiences outside of those we already work with. With some project work we take to the streets and grow our audience. We have a great relationship with the primary school local to us, who visit when they are doing project work on Folkestone's past and future. However limited resources and staff time affects our ability to reach out to new audiences beyond those passing by, participating in projects and coming to events. URF is primarily documented through its website, where all past events can still be seen. The website also hosts useful resources such as the Urban Analysis.

Image:

UR Folkestone

Credit: Igor Emmerich

**Impact of the UR:****On placemaking:**

The Urban Room has hosted public exhibitions and discussions aimed at shaping the future of several important undeveloped sites in Folkestone, particularly the former gasworks and disused harbour train line, the former of which is now being developed. The founder, Diane Dever regularly consults with key stakeholders and developers in the town in regards to audience development for arts-led placemaking. URF in some sense offers a space to analyse, critique and learn from the particular version of arts-led placemaking that is happening in Folkestone.

On participants:

Participants in URF activities are actively engaging in the civic life of the town, they develop a greater sense of community and of having some say on what happens in and to the town. All visitors develop their understanding of Folkestone as a place, and many engage in discussions about what the future could or should look like.

On the host organisation:

URF doesn't have a single host organisation. But for those organisations that we work with or that use the space the main impact is to see their own place in the town, and to see how they can and do contribute. For Folkestone Fringe the Urban Room serves to maintain the focus of their arts activity on the place of Folkestone and on using arts to talk about and shape the town.

What was the primary challenge for your UR and how did you tackle it?

Probably the main challenge for URF is establishing formal relationships with the key stakeholders in the town. The problem with not being funded by or established by any of these organisations is that they tend to be less interested in engaging. In particular, getting the district council to engage with us has been a slow process, but through gentle, consistent pressure we are opening channels of dialogue and working with them more and more.

What advice would you give someone setting up an Urban Room?

Focus on getting as wide a range of people as possible to feel some sense of ownership of or connection to the space. If someone wants to do something in your Urban Room, try to say yes, whether it's yoga, sewing, performance art, or a gig, because this is what gets people in and looking at what's on the walls and having conversations about it. Obviously there are limits to this, but at URF as long as something can in some way be seen as 'civic' then we are happy to host it.

Image:

UR Folkestone

Credit: Igor Emmerich

**More information:**www.urbanroomsnetwork.org/network/www.urbanroomfolkestone.net/about-ur/www.urbanroomfolkestone.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Urban-Analysis_2016..pdfwww.creativefolkestone.org.uk/artists/diane-dever-and-the-decorators-artworks/

Acknowledgements:

The Urban Room Toolkit has been funded and supported by The University of Sheffield, the Greater London Authority and [Urban Room Folkestone](#) and the [Urban Rooms Network](#).

It was researched, written and produced by [Live Works](#), [The University of Sheffield, School of Architecture](#) (Carolyn Butterworth, Rosa Turner Wood, James Harrington)

With thanks to Diane Dever and Greg Taylor at [UR Folkestone](#), Claire Tymon at [Local](#), Peter Kemp and Natalie Wells at the [Greater London Authority](#), Kate Riggs at [Croydon Council](#), Laura Alvarez at [Urban Room Nottingham](#), Janet Morris at [STAMP](#)

Also many thanks to our Advisory Group: Sol Pérez Martínez, Akil Scafe-Smith, Simeon Shtebunaev

Graphic design by [Jon Cannon](#)

Website design by [Ross Bennett](#)

The Urban Rooms Toolkit is a public resource to be used, downloaded and shared by anyone interested in situated creative community engagement in placemaking. If you have any ideas or experience you would like to share and potentially contribute to the Toolkit please join the [Urban Rooms Network](#)!

This document is a downloadable, printer friendly version of the Urban Rooms Toolkit which can be found at urbanroomstoolkit.org

