Land of Green Ginger Evaluation: 7 Alleys

**Core Project Team Focus Group Report**

The following report summarises feedback from the Core Project Team behind 7 Alleys, the first event to be delivered as part of Land of Green Ginger (LOGG), a citywide programme that seeks to engage with local communities across Hull through free arts and cultural activities.

The focus group was conducted during the team’s debrief meeting on Thursday 11th May. A transcript of the discussions is shown as an appendix, although please note that due to technical issues the first 15 minutes were not recorded and detailed notes are included in lieu.

## Attendees

To be supplied.

# Conceptual development

The original proposal submitted by Periplum was considered to be sufficiently ambitious, but Hull 2017 pushed them to create something on a larger scale. The type of event they were encouraged to deliver was actually more suited to their skills and experience.

The Core Project Team appear to have been closely involved in the conceptual and artistic development of the performance from the very beginning, which made this process slightly different to the normal way of working. Investing time and effort in the R&D phase and bringing artists together was crucial in facilitating this approach.

“If we hadn’t gone through that pilot process and all the work we’ve done since bringing the Green Ginger artists together, and developing that trust, which costs money and takes time, we wouldn’t have had that trust, you know, it’s not that normal for a Producer to come and say, what are we doing about the end bit? Is it working for you as well? Unless you have that relationship.

There were a series of discussions between the two parties about creating something that would engage the community, which was central to the development of the 7 Alleys narrative. The story was first mentioned in an anecdote by a local community member, and further consultation with the community helped the team develop the eventual narrative that was used to structure the performance.

The team decided to focus on the story because there was clearly flexibility to interpret it in various, creative ways. It also provided a strong connection to the local community without being too intrusive or insular.

“It’s not too much about people’s lives as well, a lot projects where artists want to go into communities and work with people and make it about their stories, and it’s a bit too personal, a bit too close, whereas this, it does have a connection to people’s lives but it’s not as personal.”

Whilst Hull 2017 felt the story of 7 Alleys had been in keeping with the overall LOGG narrative, they were keen to point out that the Green Ginger Fellowship story was really a framing device and wasn’t intended to govern how projects played out.

“We’ve got a bit of a sense of where we’re going but it’s always been ‘we know what’s going to happen at the start, we know how it’s going to end, but we don’t necessarily know what’s going to happen in the middle’.”

Periplum were therefore given flexibility and were encouraged to be creative in how they interpreted the stories they learnt about the 7 Alleys.

“At one point they [artists] got so drawn into the overall narrative that they were like, we’re going to change our project, and we tried to say no, you need to do what you want to do with your project, and let the bigger picture go with it.”

The torn pages of a book containing a riddle provided the link between 7 Alleys and the next LOGG project, and the team felt this was an effective linking device because it created mystery and drama. Indeed they reported that people have generally responded well to the concept of using crates and riddles, which is something they’ll be focusing on in future.

“The first crate that was opened up had a riddle in it was basically a mechanism for us to be able to talk about where and when, but the engagement with the riddle was really interesting and that’s something we’ll do more of now in the project and we’ve really got to develop that idea because we know that that’s the thing that’s really caught people’s imaginations.”

However, one of the major challenges they expect to face moving forward will be to manage the audience’s expectations, given that the next event will be very different to 7 Alleys in terms of format and style. The Green Ginger fellowship story will be the mechanism to manage these expectations.

“It is about changing expectations because it ain’t gonna be a great, 4 night spectacle, it’s gonna be a small, 9-week installation of a very very different nature so I think we could do with using our structure and our Green Ginger Fellowship to set those expectations a bit more in line with what it’s going to be.”

There was also some concern that other communities might expect a similar event based on an aspect of their history or identity.

“We’ve got to just take a minute and be really careful that it’s not going to…that the projects that are coming next are not going to feel like they’ve had less thought or connection, how we put other stuff around it as well, because there’s much more fiction around the things that are coming up than this one and I think we’ve inadvertently set an expectation that the project is all about real, genuine myths of Hull interpreted in a new way.”

Without this direct connection there was clearly a concern that future projects might not achieve the same level of engagement and resonance with other communities, however it was also pointed out that delivering projects within these areas would automatically give local people a sense of ownership.

“The cool thing is that 7 Alleys has its own story and I think core to that was that people had a personal connection to it and they felt it was theirs. Keeping that as a thread going forward is the strength of it, that people have that ownership, they felt it was personally connected with them, so they felt like they wanted to be actively involved which I think, you know, the Nose project will do that because it intrinsically belongs to them, it is theirs!”

# Performance

The team were generally agreed that 7 Alleys had met the objectives of the Land of Green Ginger in creating something which was mysterious, distinctive, exquisite, and cohesive. Ways in which the performance met each of these criteria are shown below:

## Mysterious

*Astonishment, intrigue and curiosity.*

* Marcomms approach helped to create a sense of mystery as it was never clear about what type of event it would be.
* The 7 Alleys story was mysterious in itself - based on an urban legend passed down through the generations.
* The Green Ginger narrative and the crates, which created speculation about what was inside.
* The horse and carriage deliveries which didn’t explicitly answer people’s questions but encouraged them to follow the story. Also, recipients weren’t told who had nominated them.
* Using East Park meant that the Preston Road community generally weren’t exposed to the setup and production of the event.

## Distinctive

*Uncovering, expressing and celebrating things which could only happen in Hull.*

* Creating a large-scale performance based on a myth that was well-known in the Preston Road area
* People in the area would have been used to seeing a rag and bone man on a horse and carriage. In this case they were presented with a more magical version.
* Text in the show used local voices, dialect and slang.

## Exquisite

*Things so detailed and perfectly formed that – tiny or huge – they leave a lasting impression.*

* A complex, interweaving structure that draws the audience in through intrigue and mystery.
* Lots of research and community engagement, getting under the skin of 7 Alleys and documenting local stories and experiences attached to the myths and characters.
* Every element of the 7 Alleys journey was put together with such care – from the design of the overall set to the utter detail of the bottle design in the pilot project.
* Torn pages of the book with the next clue fuelled the intrigue about the next story.

## Connection

*Things which bind people together and forge connections within communities and across the city.*

* Nominations for the message in a bottle formed invisible links of connection within the community. This was also discussed on social media.
* The story of 7 Alleys was told (to Periplum) by members of the community themselves, who ‘owned’ the story and became experts on it – correcting people from the outside, sometimes even arguing about content!
* The performance brought an instant connection between audience members due to shared memories of the tale.
* The audience were mainly from the local community.

# Working with Periplum

Having a close working relationship - and in close proximity on-site – was considered to be central to the success of 7 Alleys, as it enabled both parties to utilise each other’s skills and experiences.

“It was a really good example of where you’ve got your different experience and objectives and together that alchemy leads to something. If they were just making a piece of work in a vacuum to deliver, or we were much more hands-off, you know, we’ll commission you and off you go, I don’t think we’d have got anywhere near the quality of the project that we got”

There appears to have been a strong sense of trust and a willingness to collaborate between the two parties, which had been built through the process of delivering the pilot and working with other Green Ginger artists. The team felt that Periplum themselves had welcomed the team’s contributions, and were willing to act on suggestions and criticisms. Even technical issues were resolved in partnership.

“Even when it’s a crisis, on night two when the horses didn’t arrive, we solved that together, you know, we were chipping in bits of ideas for how that could be worked out.”

One of the few criticisms of Periplum was that they sometimes needed Hull 2017 to give them ‘approval’ on certain ideas, although this reflected their commitment to working collaboratively.

The team felt strongly that Periplum had challenged themselves with 7 Alleys. Even though the final production was more in keeping with their previous work, they felt the task of developing a cohesive narrative and engaging the community had pushed them out of their comfort zone. For example, they were initially very nervous about the horse and carriage deliveries.

“In the end it was a combination of the tried and tested stuff that they knew worked, and new adaptions on techniques that they thought,ok that would work beautifully in the show, and then stuff that was new to them as well, so it wasn’t all, oh my god, I have no idea if this is going to work or not, but it was still ambitious and testing.”

In terms of new approaches and skills developed by Periplum, over the course of 7 Alleys they worked with:

* a new lighting designer**;**
* animals (horses) for the first time;
* a greater number of community participants than they’d ever worked with before.

They also designed and built the structures specifically for 7 Alleys. Hull 2017 felt this willingness to try new things was, in part, due to their encouragement and cajoling.

There was agreement that Periplum had been flexible in how they’d approached the project and had taken on board the suggestions made by Hull 2017. This had been reflected in the final performance, which some felt was more balanced than their previous work.

“One of my criticisms of their previous work was that it can be really text-heavy, and the balance between text, visual and experience can be a bit off, and this was text-heavy but it was so beautiful – the rhythm of it, the poetry of it – I thought they got that better than they have done with their previous work”.

Their ability to engage with non-arts audiences was also praised.

“They can engage with a non-arts audience with stuff that’s **INAUDIBLE 34.20 –** and they know that that’s what they’re doing, but they can achieve that, and other people just can’t seem to get that quite right”.

# Location

The team were agreed that East Park had been the best choice for the event, despite acknowledging it was slightly removed from the site of the Holderness Drain and the Preston Road community they were trying to engage.

Other locations around Preston Road were also considered, but nowhere was suitable for the type of performance and the sheer number of people they anticipated.

There was some anxiety about moving the event away from Preston Road, but hosting it elsewhere meant that fewer people were exposed to the team’s preparations, which in turn created a greater sense of mystery and intrigue when it came to the performance.

“Some of the big things we talked about with Land of Green Ginger have been about transforming the places where people live. You could say we didn’t do that with this project, we transformed it just a bit down the road which is, kind of, easier to transform. On the other hand, what we gained was the mysterious and the intrigue, and all the rest of it, because if we’d been building there for a week on that bit of ground next to the drain, everyone would have seen the production, everyone would have seen the sound checking and the rehearsing, and we wouldn’t have had that same sense of occasion.”

The decision on the location of the event was again made in collaboration with Periplum during the conceptual development phase. The fact that the decision was made quite early on helped the creative development process as it broadened the parameters of the performance space and allowed the team to focus on what the show would look like, rather than worrying about the logistics.

“[The decision to use East Park] kind of happened at the same time as we were developing the show content and it kind of happened in parallel which was really nice, so we were talking about numbers, we were talking about expectations, we were talking about what it would look like…then there was a third conversation that was OK, it is East Park, so what does it look like in East Park? And that was the conversation about the clock tower and five hundred people going up a tiny little path and…it started these show content discussions. And as you were saying it helped those guys because it gave them the confidence and comfort to go, right, this is what we’re comfortable with, we know this, so we can focus on the content…rather than the faffiness of trying to get a certain number of people in here, looking at all the different entries”.

The relationship with Hull Culture and Leisure (HC&L), who manage the site, appears to have been straightforward, despite some initial confusion about the cost of using the park.

“In the grand scheme of our relationship with Hull Culture and Leisure, it was one of the less painful ones.”

There was, however, a feeling that HC&L were not as proactive and helpful as they might have been had they realised the potential benefits of the event in terms of promoting the park and attracting new audiences to the area.

“I think politically and practically, fine, absolutely no bother, we were allowed to, you know, just get on with it, but in terms of that strategic partnership with benefits…I mean what didn’t come across was the benefits to the park in terms of doing things like this which was introducing audiences to the park and bringing people into that area who might come back to do other things.”

# Professional development

Implementing an effective and cohesive marcomms strategy was the main challenge of working on 7 Alleys. The objective was to promote the event in a way which created mystery and intrigue, whilst also conveying practical communications such as start time and event restrictions.

Some had found it difficult to convey this approach to other members of the team, and there was a suggestion that they’d faced criticism. However, the group felt the success of 7 Alleys had justified their approach, and they would take confidence into the next projects.

“We all are living it and have a feel for it and understand how it should be presented, but trying to get that across to external members of the team has been really difficult, and it’s really hard because you don’t want to be constantly disregarding suggestions from them!”

Ensuring that all content was cohesive and fit within the wider LOGG narrative was another challenge, particularly as the Green Ginger Fellowship story had been developed solely by the Executive Producer.

The team felt that some aspects – like the bottle deliveries - were quite different in tone to other Hull 2017 projects like Made in Hull or Back to Ours. Ensuring staff and volunteers were sensitive to this had therefore proved difficult, and some felt that people needed to understand the project fully before they got involved. It was also mentioned that the Hull 2017 ‘brand’ wasn’t appropriate for this type of activity, despite a suggestion they had been put under pressure to use this identity.

“I think so far some of the things that have been delivered have been quite loud and in your face and really energetic, and I’ve noticed with this that when I’ve been out doing carriage rides it has been quite sombre at times, and it was all about catering to the audience and that’s what’s felt really nice, they’ve been really respectful to the audience in that area. I noticed one day that there was a couple of **men** from the 2017 team that came and they were shouting and singing and I was like, get them out of here! But that’s been a challenge, you need to explain to people you need to understand what this project is, this isn’t welcoming people to Made in Hull”.

On several occasions, Core Project Team members said they had made key decision based on learning from the pilot projects (e.g. using a horse and carriage, and developing the marcomms strategy). This has clearly reaffirmed their commitment to investing in research and development.

On a more practical level, individuals had learnt a lot about working with horses, fire, and managing the press.

# Community engagement

The community engagement aspect of the project was considered to be innovative in that the artistic team wanted to learn from community members, rather than teaching them about the arts. Generally they felt the community had responded more positively to this kind of approach compared to the more traditional method of holding workshops or focus groups, and for this reason they were keen to take this forward into future events.

“You don’t always have to be going into places and teaching them something, you can turn that on its head a little bit. And that’s a way of getting people and communities to teach us something. That’s what’s worked with 7 Alleys and that’s what we need to do going forward”.

Using local stories and myths gives people a sense of ownership, particularly in Hull where communities are defensive of their traditions and culture.

“It’s a Hull thing as well, Hull’s not had the best press, so people tend to latch on to that kind of stuff more than they would do in any other city.”

This level of community engagement had been a new experience for Periplum, but the team felt that it had ultimately paid off for both audience members and the artists.

“They got so much out of doing that, and the feedback they got was amazing. That was something they weren’t used to doing”.

# Audience response

Hull 2017 agreed that 7 Alleys had attracted the type of audience they had wanted to attract, i.e. those from the Preston Road estate who were not necessarily engaged with the arts. They also agreed that the audience’s reaction had been overwhelmingly positive, in large part due to the emotional connection with the content with which they felt a sense of ownership.

“It was a spectacle which was great…but actually it was the content that engaged people and made that show a success”.

“As they were leaving there were people crying, including me, and that summed it up for me, that there was an emotion about it and a resonance, and it engaged with people on loads of different levels”.

It was pointed out that people had bought into the mystery surrounding the event, and the vast majority had refrained from posting photos on Facebook. There had also been public criticism of the Hull Daily Mail for posting a live video of the event because people wanted others to enjoy the same experience.

A handful of people had commented that it simply wasn’t for them, but the team hadn’t received any negative comments or criticism of the performance itself.

# Summary of key points and learning

* The 7 Alleys story was the perfect fit for LOGG because it provided artistic license to create something spectacular and mysterious based on well-known stories that resonated with the local community.
* The community engagement work further entrenched a sense of ownership with the project as a whole. All this was reflected in the positive feedback from audiences.
* The quality of the performance was highly praised and Hull 2017 felt it had been enhanced by the contributions made by both parties.
* The team agreed that 7 Alleys had met the objectives of LOGG projects in creating something mysterious, exquisite, distinctive and cohesive.
* The performances were successful in attracting people from the Preston Road area, and importantly many of them were previously disengaged with the arts.
* A positive, close working relationship was established with Periplum, who were flexible and willing to try new things on the back of suggestions by Hull 2017. Encouraging them to be more ambitious and take risks was a major factor in the success of the project.
* Investing time in R&D and bringing LOGG artists together during this period was pivotal in generating mutual trust. This enabled Hull 2017 to have such a strong influence on the development of 7 Alleys.
* The team have taken confidence from the success of the project particularly in terms of their marcomms strategy.
* The decision to use East Park was justified given the performance space required. Indeed, holding the event away from the Preston Road community actually contributed to the sense of mystery.
* Whilst the relationship with HC&L was satisfactory, there appears to be an opportunity for them to become more like a strategic partner on future projects
* Some of the major challenges and opportunities moving forward are:
  + Managing public expectations of future projects, given that they will be very different to 7 Alleys.
  + Continuing to implement an effective marcomms strategy which balances a sense of mystery and intrigue with essential information about events.
  + Delegating tasks to other staff members and volunteers, which has proven difficult due to the unique nature of LOGG.
  + Ensuring consistency of narrative.
  + Developing a positive working relationship with other artists and challenging them creatively.
  + Ensuring the community is placed at the heart of projects so that performances and installations resonate with them.
  + Building on the successful elements of the pilot projects, a strategy which has proved to be incredibly useful in shaping the approach to 7 Alleys.

# Appendix: Transcript of meeting

*Please note that sections in red sections are based on notes. The rest is a transcription of the recording.*

**First of all I’d like you to think about how the project was developed both practically and conceptually.**

**What were your thoughts on the proposal submitted by Periplum for the 2017 project, in terms of its progression from what they delivered in the 2016 pilot? Probe: did it meet your hopes and expectations? Did it answer your brief? Was it sufficiently ambitious?**

Not too ambitious but they wanted to do something smaller scale and we pushed them to do something on a larger scale (aimed to get an audience 8,000 – 10,000) which actually was more suited to what they can deliver.

There were lots of different elements and we pushed them to be more focused. Lots of discussions. They were open to working with us to develop the concept. Pilot proved really useful in terms of developing the narrative and the concept.

At one point they became too hung up on the overall narrative for the LOGG in terms of community participation.

**Can you tell me a bit more about the process of working with Periplum to develop the concept?**

**Probe: How much input was required from your side to make it a success? What was the main advice and guidance you gave the company? What were the main changes from the original proposal to final delivery of 7 Alleys, and what motivated these changes?**

They were a bit all over the place in terms of what they wanted to deliver but we said you should concentrate on a certain area and that gave them the focus they needed. I think they needed that guidance from us – they almost needed approval from us.

Good example of a close working relationship between a Director and a company – if we’d have left them to their own devices, what they’d come up with would have been very different to what they actually delivered.

They had their own internal issues at the time which didn’t help – but we didn’t realise that until later on.

Main advice and guidance was to go with what you’re good at – the type and scale of performance. The pilot had enabled us to build that trust. Think they definitely trusted us to help steer the direction of the piece and make it a success.

**One of the objectives of the 7 Alleys project was to use high quality and imaginative outdoor theatre to explore and celebrate what makes the chosen neighbourhoods in Holderness ward unique. How successful was the 7 Alleys in achieving this objective?**

Very much so. The story really resonated with people in the local area. It gave them a voice and a story – normally artists go into these communities with a story to tell, but this was the opportunity for the people to tell their stories.

Understood it wasn’t a real story so that gave us the opportunity to interpret the stories and play around with them to make them suitable for the performance.

People were proud to say they knew about the 7 Alleys, and to offer their own interpretations and experiences of the stories.

A lot of discussion around the venue – eventually when we decided on East Park that almost gave them the parameters to deliver the event they did.

One of the challenges moving forward is to make people realise that not all the LOGG projects will be like 7 Alleys – they’re going to be very different – for example the next one will be an installation on a much smaller scale.

People are contacting the Green Ginger fellowship with queries and comments – some people think it’s a genuine organisation.

**Probe: do you think the interpretation of the stories was clear to the audience?**

Clear enough, but that’s part of the artistic license of the piece – to interpret them in a certain way. It certainly resonated with the people from those communities who knew about the 7 Alleys.

**Would you say the 7 Alleys has been successfully woven into the overall narrative of the Land of Green Ginger project?**

Well basically the object was to find some crates and then distract them with whatever was in the crates that alluded to 7 Alleys so, it kind of worked and in that way it was interwoven. People have stopped asking about crates for a bit.

I don’t think you can measure that yet because the biggest narrative is the bigger narrative and we’re only at the beginning and we are making it up as we go along, we’ve got a bit of a sense of where we’re going but it’s always been ‘we know what’s going to happen at the start, we know how it’s going to end, but we don’t necessarily know what’s going to happen in the middle’. I think when we said that originally we thought we’d have a bit of an idea at the end of last year and we do know more, but it’s still, because it’s still so dynamic, and online, and responsive to people, we’ve still got that real niggle, it’s a real headache and very difficult to do in that way, but it gives it more connections to people. We know now…one of the things that Christie did that was woven into the story that was very clever was the first crate that was opened up had a riddle in, it was basically a mechanism for us to be able to talk about where and when, but the engagement with the riddle was really interesting and that’s something we’ll do more of now in the project and we’ve really got to develop that idea because we know that that’s the thing that’s really caught people’s imaginations. So it’s given us a steer about how we develop the real narrative rather than us knowing from the beginning knowing exactly how it’s going to play out.

I think because it’s in people’s own history and it’s a legend people are really interested in that sort of stuff, s in that sense this project is easier than some of the other projects in being able to weave stuff in. It’s been really good to hear their own stories and it’s encouraged people to submit their own memories and that kind of thing, but with the next project it’s kind of far out! It has fewer tangible links to local history.

Yeah you’re absolutely right and that’s probably my main anxiety moving forward is that a set of expectations have come about because of this project being so beautiful in that connection that we’ve got to just take a minute and be really careful that it’s not going to…that the projects that are coming next are not going to feel like they’ve had less thought or connection, how we put other stuff around it as well, because there’s much more fiction around the things that are coming up than this one and I think we’ve inadvertently set an expectation that the project is all about real, genuine myths of Hull interpreted in a new way.

What we did do with this one was that we harked back to a lot of what happened in the pilot project through the marcomms strategy in the lead up to the event, and I think we can do that with the others, we just have to think about it a bit more. For that community, you know, Christina told them the story of the 7 Alleys and that eventually became what they [Periplum] led with, but that isn’t what they went with in the first instance…the audience that came were a local audience and it was for them and it was about replicating those stories but making it specific to the project, so I guess in terms of the whole overall narrative it might feel a bit all over the place but I guess if we’re focusing on those communities then they might feel it’s less random and hopefully by the end they’ll see the overall picture.

I think it’s important not to…because at one point they [artists] got so drawn into the heralding and the overall narrative that they were like, we’re going to change our project, and we tried to say no, you need to do what you want to do with your project, and let the bigger picture go with it. I feel that was the right thing to do. And I think starting with 7 Alleys, potentially 7 Alleys could have been that narrative across the whole thing, so I think it’s starting in a place where it’s very easy for people to engage with it and they will go on that journey, they will be like crazy noses? OK I’ll go to crazy noses in Bransholme and they’ll absolutely love it. And in the same way people in Bransholme will be like, these are our noses!

They’re quite protective of them aren’t they!

I think that’s the cool thing is that 7 Alleys has it’s own story at Preston Road that existed, and I think core to that was that people had a personal connection to it and they felt it was theirs and I think the next, keeping that as a thread going forward is the strength of it, that people have that ownership, they felt it was personally connected with them, so they felt like they wanted to be actively involved which I think, you know, the nose project will do that because it intrinsically belongs to them, it is theirs!

As a point of note in our conversations with artists, just those little tweaks that can just give it that bedded in -ness to those communities, so thinking about the Longhill project, quite a while ago all their ideas would be that they’d do something about the names of the streets in that area and the fact that they’re named after rivers or something like that, and giving them that sense that it’s actually got that bedded-in-ness to it gives you that relationship and connection the community as much as the connections of individuals, and that’s what’s coming across with the riddles and people wanting them…so I think we can make more of Josh’s back story, for instance, I know it’s made up, but it’s still connected to the name of the place so we just need to find another couple of things that are real about that that we can sew through it as well.

It’s a Hull thing as well, people feel like, obviously Hull’s not had the best press, so people tend to latch on to that kind of stuff more than they would do in any other city.

It is something I always wanted to have in this project, and you know, we did it in a previous project as well, in that it was complete fiction but there were some things in it where there was a kernel of truth, so one of the things in it was that there was a man who built a house in the middle of this park and the only thing that was real about it was his name and that he had a daughter, and then we built the story from there – the only reason the house was designed in the way it was, was explained through the story which was made up. But people go, oh well that bit’s real, so is the other stuff real as well? They’re happy to go into that story world then.

It’s not too much about people’s lives as well, a lot projects where artists want to go into communities and work with people and make it about their stories, and it’s a bit too personal, a bit too close, whereas this, it does have a connection to people’s lives but it’s not as personal.

There’s a bit of that with the Green Ginger Fellowship, people aren’t quite sure if they’re real or not.

“Can I report an incident?!” [Laughter]

**So is the next project the Nose project in Bransholme? And were there any connections between this project and the next one?**

Yes.

**How successfully do you think that connection was made clear to the audience?**

It’s not clear, but that was intentional. We want to slowly leak the information out again. So there were bits of paper that were distributed at the end and on one side there was some text on the 7 Alleys and the other side it had a riddle which points them to the location of the next project. Most people have worked it out now but what we could do now is to find some more stuff around…it is about changing expectations because it ain’t gonna be a great, 4 night spectacle, it’s gonna be a small, 9-week installation of a very very different nature so I think we could do with using our structure and our Green Ginger Fellowship to set those expectations a bit more in line with what it’s going to be.

**I’m going to move onto the next topic now, which we’ve touched upon already. So I understand there were quite a few discussions around the best location for this event. What eventually led you to choose East Park?**

The size, the closeness to Preston Road.

It would have been awful if we’d gone any further away but luckily we had the connection with the park.

**Were there any other locations that were seriously considered?**

Yes we spent a lot of time seriously considering locations in that neighbourhood, but that was the only other option really.

Yeah we started looking at the drain a bit more seriously after the Alleys side of things but it kind of happened at the same time as we were developing the show content and it kind of happened in parallel which was really nice, so we were talking about numbers, we were talking about expectations, we were talking about what it would look like, and it all happened at the same time which led to a conclusion – we all led to a conclusion – as Periplum did as well – then there was a third conversation that was OK, it is East Park, so what does it look like in East Park, and that was the conversation about the clock tower and five hundred people going up a tiny little path and it started that process which was useful because it started these show content discussions. And as you were saying it helped those guys because it gave them the confidence and comfort to go, right, this is what we’re comfortable with, we know this, so we can focus on the content, and the resonating content rather than the faffiness of trying to get a certain number of people in here, looking at all the different entries, which I think was useful.

Can you imagine trying to get all those people up to the bridge?!

No.

[Laughter]

There’s a lovely view down the drain here as you’re stood on that little sticky out bit on the platform but it’s only about big enough for 3 people and what about all the other thousands of people who want to see it!

**INAUDIBLE**

It’s interesting because I think we all felt a bit of anxiety about moving it away from the community, and again some of the big things we talked about with Land of Green Ginger have been about transforming the places where people live. You could say we didn’t do that with this project, we transformed it just a bit down the road which is, kind of, easier to transform. On the other hand, what we gained was the mysterious and the intrigue, and all the rest of it, because if we’d been building there for a week on that bit of ground next to the drain, everyone would have seen the production, everyone would have seen the sound checking and the rehearsing, and we wouldn’t have had that same sense of occasion where people were turning up to the park wondering what it’s gonna be, might be a ghost walk, you don’t know if your friends are gonna be there, so I think we gained a lot more from just taking it a little bit away from right in their immediate environment.

It’s transformed people’s, you know loads of people in that area are bound to find the alleys...

**[INAUDIBLE]**

…it just completely changed the way it felt to be out and about in that area and it was hilarious when we then got people to the park…just thinking about the last night and people were saying, oh it’s that one that comes round where we live!, like a regular thing, just this notion that they’ve got this magic horse and carriage that comes round every couple of weeks.

**How did you find working with Hull Culture and Leisure in terms of securing the site and the practicalities of production?**

Expensive!

[Laughter]

Er, in the grand scheme of our relationship with Hull Culture and Leisure, it was one of the less painful ones.

I think politically and practically, fine, absolutely no bother, we were allowed to, you know, just get on with it, but in terms of that strategic partnership with benefits to…I mean what didn’t come across was the benefits to the park in terms of doing things like this which was introducing audiences to the park and bringing people into that area who might come back to do other things.

[Chat about who came to the event from Hull Culture and Leisure]

Yeah I think it’s disappointing that they don’t see the benefit in a partnership way of working on something like this and actually we were given quite a lot of dodgy information at first as well, at the beginning, it was really unclear what the charges were going to be and even when I finally had a spreadsheet that was sent through with the detail it still wasn’t clear what tier they were going to lump us in, but like I said there have been much worse relationships with HC and L.

Yeah.

**OK I’d now like you to think about working with Periplum again. As the key creative partner on this project, do you feel they challenged themselves with 7 Alleys compared to their previous work?**

Oh yes.

Yes.

Well I think on that basis…!

They were terrified at times, they were really nervous about it, which was interesting because they have done some very large shows before but I think was a lot of stuff going on for them which we didn’t know about at the time, erm, but yeah they challenged themselves, they worked with some new people, they tried out some new techniques and I think it all worked great. I think they would say that our support and cajoling was instrumental in that as well, so yeah in terms of my experience of relationships between producers and artists, it was a really good example of where you’ve got your different experience and objectives and together that alchemy leads to something but if they were just making a piece of work in a vacuum to deliver, or we were much more hands-off, you know, we’ll commission you and off you go, I don’t think we’d have got anywhere near the quality of the project that we got.

I think they trusted us.

Yes they did.

There was space for them to get on with developing the show, and there was space for us to be able to secure the site, but there was a trust that they could come to us because of our visible presence there which was useful for them as well.

And also, because it’s a new commission, there were clearly bits of the show that were theirs but there was quite an openness to our feedback and steer on the beginning and the end bit, and some of the elements within it. And again if we hadn’t gone through that pilot process and all the work we’ve done since bringing the Green Ginger artists together, and developing that trust, which costs money and takes time, we wouldn’t have had that trust, you know, it’s not that normal for a Producer to come and say, what are we doing about the end bit? Is it working for you as well? Unless you have that relationship. And even when it’s a crisis, on night two when the horses didn’t arrive, we solved that together, you know, we were chipping in bits of ideas for how that could be worked out.

**So what was new for them in terms of the artistic approaches or technical things that they did?**

Horses.

Yes working with horses - I think all of us fell into that category!

[Laughter]

Working with live animals, they had a new structure built specifically for the show. They worked with a new lighting designer, they also worked with a lot of the same people but they approached it in a new kind of way.

They wanted to work with participants from the community, and I think the number of participants who were involved in the show was new to them.

In the end it was a combination of the tried and tested stuff that they knew worked, and new adaptions on techniques that they thoughtok that would work beautifully in the show, and then stuff that was new to them as well, so it wasn’t all, oh my god, I have no idea if this is going to work or not, but it was still ambitious and testing

**And how much of that was down to you pushing them to try new things, and how much came from their side?**

The horses thing was…it was gonna be a milk float!

I think we made the suggestion and they were really nervous about it and to be honest I think they would have backed down, if we hadn’t pushed it, that was the one thing that came out of the pilot project, and in the end they said we were so pleased you made us do that!

I think they found it really hard to find a milk float, they could only find ones that were really far away and expensive, and then they found an old milk cart but of course they needed horses!

Us giving them…because we’re not very good…I mean I’m not very good at [unclear]…it gave them, you know, the concern with them is delivering something well, and so sometimes they tend to back down from things which they might think are a bit risky, and having a company of people who say no no it’s alright we’ll back you and we’ll support you, we’ll clear courses on the main carriageways in the city, again it’s that combination of ideas from that side and permission from our side, and support to underpin it.

I think also they were so close to the audience and they’re used to doing shows where they’re not that close to the audience so for example when they did deliveries of the bottles, one of their performers was so nervous.

Yeah he was scared to death!

But they got so much out of doing that, and the feedback they got was amazing. That was something they weren’t used to doing.

Yeah but in the end he was saying, oh I want to do deliveries!

[Chatter – INAUDIBLE]

So they did enjoy that element of the performance I think.

**How do you think 7 Alleys compares to their previous work in terms of quality and ambition?**

I haven’t actually seen any of their big shows.

I think the ambition was more about the context of the story, which led to the content, that’s what spoke to people. It was a spectacle which was great, but that’s what they do, but actually it was the content that engaged people and made that show a success.

They were really really nervous about using the story and interpreting it in the right way(?)

I think it was the right tone, do you remember talking about it being a bit scary and a bit edgy, their work is a bit edgy, it is done in the dark, it is intentionally supposed to be that type of environment which puts people on edge, that’s intentional, and I think for those new audiences on Preston Road who come to these parts for the funfair only, it was really pushing that audience in terms of the experience that they had, and actually getting that across with content they understood, it allowed us to push them to the live experience that they probably hadn’t experienced before, you know, being moved around the site, having people stood so close to you, seeing East Park lit up in that kind of way, having a narrative that’s delivered in that way, but that’s all tied to that integrity around that source.

They’ve done so much work around that area in the past come back, you said you’d come back! Them saying they wanted to get an audience from Preston Road, they got an audience from Preston Road, that’s a massive thing. And also it was a brave thing to do because the marketing was only done in that area and quite easily there could have been nobody there.

But they all came back as well, a lot of them wanted to know what had happened with the stories they’d told and what they were doing.

But in terms of how it compares to some of their previous work I think doing something large-scale shows understanding what works well, I mean personally I’ve seen a lot of large-scale outdoor theatre, trying to be objective about it, which is quite difficult, but some of the stuff that they did was some of the best stuff that I’ve seen. Some of those visual images were really arresting like the [INAUDIBLE] I was like, whoa, I’ve never seen anything like that before, and the text and the soundtrack as well, it was one of those things, I mean one of my criticisms of their previous work was that it can be really text-heavy, and the balance between text, visual and experience can be a bit off, and this was text-heavy but it was so beautiful – the rhythm of it, the poetry of it – I thought they got that better than they have done with their previous work.

They can engage with a non-arts audience with stuff that’s some people really struggle with **–** and they know that that’s what they’re doing, but they can achieve that, and other people just can’t seem to get that quite right.

**I’m just going to move things on if that’s alright, because I’d like to learn a little bit about what you guys have learnt from working on the project. So, how did working on 7 Alleys challenge you as a Creative Core Team, both individually and as a group?**

The challenge with events like this, through all the comms and pre-comms, it threw all of that out the window, writing what you’d ordinarily do for an event to get people to come and see something in a park that was totally new, and how we communicated with audiences, how we assessed audiences, erm was done in a way that I don’t think has been done like that before, which was through the narrative extended – you know, through the fellowship – where we were having conversations as we went along about how we kept that in keeping with a stronger content out across the whole project, but also delivering what we needed to, which was, don’t bring your dog and all the practical stuff, and I think the challenging bit of that is not necessarily convincing people within this group that it can work and it can work really well (and I think it’s proven that as well) the challenge is convincing people external to this room to believe that this group can do these things in a way that isn’t just bog standard slapping it onto a poster and putting it up and getting people to come. And I think that step of faith….I mean what we are doing had to be explained and we tried our best to explain to certain people how this project is different, compared to you know putting on an event like Made in Hull or some of those other free-to-attend events, and we’ve proven our point, it gives us the confidence and most importantly it's given them confidence that we can continue to push this and play with it more as well. But that was a big challenge, because we’ve lived with, oh of course it’s the Green Ginger Fellowship and this is why they’re doing that, and it’s trying to articulate that in a way that speaks to quite often black-and-white issues around things like crowd dynamics, public transport…

Risk of a terror attack.

Yeah exactly all that kind of stuff.

At which point the Green Ginger Fellowship will tweet about it…

[Laughter]

But I think we achieved it.

We did. And we should all take confidence from that and we should be prepared to fight those orders more strongly, but it’s one of those things where you kind of know it but there’s a nervousness about putting it down on the line and going we need to do it like this, but about 2 weeks before it I was fed up of saying, look I know it might look wrong, but this is what we’re doing, we’ve all signed up to it, and as long as we all know that it might go wrong but we’ve got some plans in place when it does, can we just stop talking about it and get on with it. But it took a long time to get to that stage where we just had to dig our heels in and let us get on with it. Enough!

I think we were beginning to get to the point where we had to say, we’ve all done this before so let’s have faith in the expertise around the table, let’s not try to keep proving the point to the externals, you know, we’ve done that, we’ve given them the information, now let’s just get on with the good people we have and, as a team, we’ll deal with it. And actually coming to that point was really refreshing because it was like, fine, let’s go and do it.

The other thing that was challenging was treading a fine line between trying to push messages out and getting people engaged in the narrative, trying to get people to come but then, at the same time, saying please don’t all come!

[Laughter]

But as you say working with people who are external or even people in our extended team, to understand that and understand the reasons behind it, you almost had to go with your gut instinct and not necessarily being able to impart [communicate?] that to someone else, that was quite difficult. Those conversations were quite challenging!

I think there were lots of tears on the pilot, you know with the families that we engaged with, there were some stories there that, you know, it was brilliant and it was a great experience to be part of, and it was brilliant to see how the arts can impact people in that way. There was a family who’d been nominated to receive a bottle who’d lost a little girl a week before, and it was the sister of the mother who’d lost this child, and she was like, I really want you to come still I think it’ll really help her, erm and how the team dealt with that, they just stepped back and talked about it for a little while, and moved onto the next delivery, and the woman said it really had helped her. She wanted to come on the carriage so we had it arranged and she knew what time we were coming and it was really quiet. I think so far some of the things that have been delivered have been quite loud and in your face and really energetic, and I’ve noticed with this that when I’ve been out doing carriage rides it has been quite sombre at times, and it was all about catering to the audience and that’s what’s felt really nice, they’ve been really respectful to the audience in that area. I noticed one day that there was a couple of men from the 2017 team that came and they were shouting and singing and I was like, get them out of here! But that’s been a challenge, you need to explain to people you need to understand what this project is, this isn’t welcoming people to Made in Hull or anything else, just shut up.

It's not turquoise and teal.Not everything has to be in that brand, you know actually sometimes it does a disservice to the project and that’s OK everyone! You don’t have to be this homogenous thing. I think there was a bit of that about it but yeah, that’s what the team have got, but sometimes it feels like you’re fighting the same battles over and over again.

But trying to explain that, or get them to come out and experience it, which a lot of people won’t either, although some people did (but not sure if they behaved themselves!).

I think what we set out to do, and how it’s developed, it does feel like you’re lost in clogs (?) sometimes, but it’s absolutely right, we got it right, we’re on the right path with this, and we should take a lot of confidence from this and resolve to continue to do what we know is right.

**On a practical level then, were there any skills or knowledge that you learnt from working on the project that was new to you?**

Running after horses.

Yep working with horses.

[Laughter]

Working with fire.

Chasing after kids.

Cycling on an event, brilliant! I’ll do that whenever you want! So great!

Probably working on someone else’s narrative was interesting, because I was writing a lot of the content that’s on social media, and of course on other projects that would come from me, so working with Katy – because this is very much her narrative that she’s been working on for, what, years isn’t it Katy – so working with Maddie to extract that from Katy’s head – sounds painful doesn’t it! –in a way that reaches the audiences we want through multiple devices has been quite interesting.

I think there’s been a lot of that actually, the challenge of…cos we all are living it and have a feel for it and understand how it should be presented, but trying to get that across to external members of the team has been really difficult, and it’s really hard because you don’t want to be constantly disregarding suggestions from them!

**What are the key lessons you’ll take from this that you’ll use in future LOGG projects?**

Having that local connection… and the time they took in engaging people, because if you truly want to engage people who are disengaged with the arts, this is what you have to do.

Yeah I think it’s really interesting, when I first started working on this project, there is a sense that community engagement is about workshops and participation and du-du-du, but it’s going, that’s not really what I want it to be about, I want it to be about engagement because it’s new people, it doesn’t matter if you haven’t turned up and folded an origami swan, as if you haven’t ‘engaged’ if you haven’t been in this room for an hour, it should be about how it’s touched people and whether their perceptions about culture and the arts and things have changed, it’s about connecting people. It’s that to me, that we should try somehow to tell more people about, and telling them that engagement can happen on so many different levels, and if you’re working from the basis of zero engagement, putting out a flyer and inviting them to a workshop, just that isn’t that the way to go, it should be about interest and intrigue.

Yeah and I think giving people a sense of ownership is something that we can take through into the next projects and I think at this stage that’s something that I need to think about more.

Yeah and I also think that ownership and resonance, the ownership comes with it resonating with people so that it can have that impact.

That’s why we need to be putting real people into future events, that’s why all those scenes need to be wrapped up with people in the core, whether it’s the Hull Fair scene, it shouldn’t just be generic.

I think because he [Josh] hasn’t got a place at the minute, I mean I think he has now but, yeah I think the locality needs to be worked on more, and the same with Thor I guess, he’s having to work in all these new places and they’re almost having to start from scratch and get embedded in these places, ensuring that there’s a sense of presence and it’s integrated.

You don’t always have to be going into places and teaching them something, you can turn that on its head a little bit. And that’s a way of getting people and communities to teach us something. That’s what’s worked with 7 Alleys and that’s what we need to do going forward is to go into these communities where we don’t have these relationships that we did have, I mean we can quickly develop them…I think the challenge will be when we go to communities like Derringham where naff all happens and make something special out of it.

**With regards to the community aspect of the project, how much was Periplum and how much was driven by you guys in terms of getting out in the community and speaking to people?**

It was about even wasn’t it?

Yes.

I think they were really confident about doing that and were determined to do that as well. We went on the journey with them and they really swept people up in the performance.

**And there were local people involved in the performance?**

Yes.

**In terms of their involvement, do you think they got something out of it?**

Yes definitely.

They’ve got a closed Facebook group and they were on there constantly talking about it, and on there I’ve had people message me about personal issues that this project has helped them through.

An incredible building of confidence through it – I mean we’ve done a focus group with them – and the camaraderie amongst the group, and such a great opportunity to be part of it.

I posted something on the Monday night when you could tell they were all a bit depressed that they didn’t have 7 Alleys to go to that evening, and another opportunity had come up to be part of a flash mob and they were just like, all over it! So they’re getting involved in other things which is good, you know there isn’t a person that really didn’t help very much.

**We’re a bit pushed for time but I just wanted to touch on the audience reaction. We’ve mentioned it before but do you think the project attracted the type of audience you’d wanted originally?**

Yes.

Yes it was amazing how many people came from the estate.

**And from what you’ve seen, what’s been the overall reaction to the event?**

Overwhelmingly positive.

[Agreement around the table]

There was a moment at the end of the performance when people were walking very slowly down the final alley and they were walking side by side and there was a tangible emotion of being in that space with other people in that moment in time, having been through that performance, and as they were leaving there were people crying, including me, and that summed it up for me, that there was an emotion about it and a resonance, and it engaged with people on loads of different levels.

That’s the funny thing as well, because of the mystery it was shrouded in, people were posting on Facebook but they said they didn’t want to share photos because they wanted everyone to have the same experience. Hull Daily Mail did a Facebook Live of the whole performance and they got 800 comments of severe backlash. People just wanted to give others the same experience, and getting on to a social media and just saying how amazing it is, that just doesn’t happen on loads of projects, so when it’s positively impacted people I think they get on there and spread the word.

You could hear it as well.

I have to say as well that people are very quick to say something when they think something is shit and a waste of their time, and I haven’t heard anything.

No.

Hmm I think there were two but they didn’t say it was awful and a waste of their time, they just said it wasn’t really my thing. Even then, they didn’t say this is crap, they just said it wasn’t for them, which is fair enough.

It was like, completely out of their comfort zone for some people.

And it was amazing how people were talking about it and were explaining bits to each other.

I overheard some bloke right at the end say, well, this is better than staying in watching telly isn’t it!

**Great, I think that’s all my questions, is there anything else you wanted to add?**

No.