

# Report

## Farnham Craft Town: Application for World Craft City Status

Judges' Visit 22 – 24 February 2020



From left to right Marion Poortvliet (Crafts Council Nederland); Jane Friend (local judge); Rosy Greenlees (Chair World Crafts Council)

## Overview of the Town



## People, Places and Objects



Penny Eccles, ceramicist & UCA graduate resident at the Maltings' studios.



George Wilson, gilding, wood-graining, murals, restoration & painting.



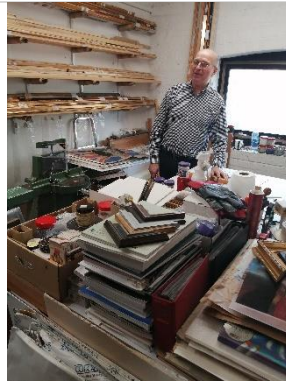
Stuey Burnett, fine art & craft photographer & filmmaker.



Nao Fukumoto, beautiful handwoven textiles using natural dyes.



Esther Pritchard, landscape artist recently relocated from her shed.



Tony Geddes, traditional picture framer.



James Fairhurst, jeweller, inspired by gemstones.



Claire Stiles, resident jeweller & author.



Hand-dyed yarn at the Unravel festival of knitting at the Maltings.



Visible Mending tutor, Anushka Tay, with the Festival Organiser.



Icelandic knitting workshop at Unravel.



From the Maltings to the Farnham Pottery...



Farnham Pottery has four studio spaces.



West Street Potter clay workshop at the Pottery.



Farnham Sculptors based at Farnham Pottery.



Shared café/ social space at the Pottery.



Dame Magdalene Odundo, UCA Chancellor and world renowned ceramicist.



Some inspirational ingredients...



Pots awaiting firing.



Recently completed studio space and new kiln.



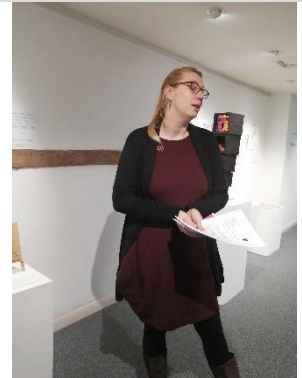
New Ashgate Gallery located in Waggon Yard Car Park.



Details of the New Ashgate Gallery's Spring Craft Collection.



Maquette of Public Craft Sculpture (David Mayne) to be installed in 2020.



Outi Remes talks about NAG's public engagement and maker development.



Visit to Watts Gallery Museum and Artist Village.



Director, Alistair Burtenshaw, brings the collection to life.



Dye for textiles produced from plants within the grounds.



Watts Chapel created by Mary Watts and 70 local makers.



The Town Council permits a cemetery chapel to be used as a maker studio.



Ian Bishop creates bespoke 3D designs for private clients.



A welcome pause for tea and cake.



Ian is networked into the local maker community.



The Crafts Study Centre is a specialist craft museum sited at the University for the Creative Arts.



Professor Simon Olding brings an exhibition to celebrate the Centre's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary to life.



A glimpse into the archives (the collection holds over 30k objects).



The Common Ground, a show curated & created by Frances Hatch.



UCA visit led by Colin Holden, Head of School.



Exploring the James Hockey Gallery at UCA.



Recently upgraded jewellery facility.



Undergraduate work in the ceramics department.



The Centre for Sustainable Design is based at UCA (apologies from Director, Professor Martin Charter).



The International Textile Research Centre is based at UCA (apologies from Director, Professor Lesley Millar).



Over 35% of Foundation students are retained on degree courses.



There is a real focus on understanding materials and process as well as product.



Textiles students.



MA student work.



Weaving.



Glass studio.

On Monday 24 February the jurors were welcomed to the Council Chamber at Farnham Town Hall for a civic gathering of the craft town organisations supporting the town's application for World Craft City status.



Pat Evans, Mayor of Farnham welcomes the jurors to a civic meeting at Farnham Town Hall.



Iain Lynch, Town Clerk, speaks of Farnham's craft heritage dating back to the Bronze Age



Cllr David Beaman speaks of the importance of craft to the health & wellbeing of local residents.



Cllr John Neale, Leader of Farnham Town Council, and interested in the role of craft in place-making.



Cllr John Ward, Leader of Waverley Borough Council speaks of the Town's Craft Heritage and how it continues to influence the town today.



Tom Horwood, CEO Waverley BC, spoke of place-making, local distinctiveness & WBC's strategic role in policy-making and profile raising.



Arts Partnership Surrey brings together the County Council & nine local authorities who use creativity to engage and help shape communities.



Chris Howard, Visit Surrey Chair, spoke of creative tourism & was passionate about the role of craft in telling the town's story.



Creative Response, which uses craft to promote health & wellbeing was also represented.



Denise Jaques, a maker who set up a network of local makers, spoke of the town as a creative hub.



Chris Shepherd, Rural Life Centre, spoke about preserving traditional skills & crafts in the town.



David Howell represents The Farnham Society, aiming to preserve the town's heritage & future.

## Observations

The jury had a full itinerary visiting a unique collection of craft organisations and huge variety of makers in the town. This report will not attempt to catalogue our visit in detail but shares the following impressions:

- *Community*  
We felt a strong sense of community in Farnham. Our perception was of a town full of makers and making at all levels, across all craft forms and in a huge range of spaces (many hidden from public view). Networks were complex and hard to map, often with committed and passionate individuals providing informal links between places and organisations. The evidence was empirical but many makers seemed to make a living from a mix of activities (e.g. making, tutoring and/or employment within a craft organisation or retail outlet).
- *Social and Economic Impact*  
There was a widespread understanding that craft was making a real social and economic impact within and beyond the town. Evidence is piecemeal and there will be real value in some of the research work currently underway in terms of demonstrating impact.
- *Heritage and Innovation*  
Farnham can trace its roots in craft back to the Bronze Age and it was fascinating to hear about the clay traditions; the wool heritage; wheel-wrighting and the National Craft Collection etc. There is also a determination within the craft community that, although the town is informed by its past and a respect for its traditions, it is very much looking towards the future and embracing new technologies and ways of working.

## Recommendations

The jurors recommend that Farnham is **approved** as a World Craft City. The jurors recognise that the Town is on a journey and we hope that the following recommendations are seen as way-markers rather than potential obstacles:

- *Profile and Communication*  
The granting of World Craft City status provides a unique opportunity to raise the profile of Farnham and the role of craft in the town's heritage and in its future direction. At present there is a certain modesty in the tone of communications, and the role of Craft Town tends to be a footnote in the messaging of individual organisations and makers.  
We would like to see a stronger, more confident central voice for this new World Craft City, which represents its constituent parts but is not obscured by them. The town should also demonstrate its awareness of broader trends and developments relating to craft regionally, nationally and internationally and capitalise on the opportunities that they bring.  
We were also intrigued by the variety of stories about craft and making which emerged during our visit and believe that there is potential for more accomplished storytelling to ensure that they reach a wider audience.
- *Partnerships*  
The relationship with UCA could be strengthened by developing a research partnership. This is underway in the study of the socio economic value of craft and Craft Month but, with the growing interest in the impact of culture on health and wellbeing, Farnham could undertake some serious research about the impact of the work that is being done.
- *Sustainability*  
The strength of Farnham as a World Craft City lies in its strong sense of cohesion and community. With a Centre for Sustainable Design at UCA, Farnham could explore being a model of the Circular Economy. And with the Borough's interest in developing business in the town creating a makerspace would be a logical next step in Farnham's development.

- *Accommodation for Makers*

It became apparent that Farnham suffers from a shortage of living and working accommodation for makers. There is a real opportunity to capitalise on the political will to use Farnham's local distinctiveness in craft to inform place-making. What buildings might be repurposed to accommodate the craft community? How might craft contribute to a revival of the High Street?

- *Leadership and Coordination*

There is an impressive range of partners involved in and supportive of the Craft Town initiative. We also saw evidence of a political will and a clarity of purpose. However, there is a risk that without clear leadership and an ability to harness and direct the energy which clearly exists within the town, this purpose will be obscured and not effectively pursued.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the town of Farnham for its hospitality. We wish the partners the best of luck in their ongoing journey and strongly encourage them to instigate and maintain a dialogue with their fellow World Craft Cities. We have much to learn from each other.