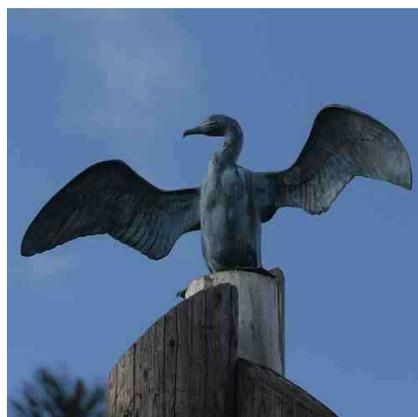


Wayne Hemingway's Keynote speech

**Nalgao conference, Blackpool
Wednesday 8th October 2008**

Cheers, afternoon. First of all, our time as creative people has come. When I look out at you lot and the job that you do, I don't see the word art at all. I know you've got that nominal title and that this conference has got the word art in it. But there's much more to that; you're part of the creative industries and for the first time ever the creative industries are seen as something very important financially to this country. And it's a time when we are going through financial crisis and you see service industries suffering like crazy. Retail is just about to fall off a cliff, believe me, it's going to be bad over the next six months. If you think the figures that you're seeing from the likes of MFI and M&S are bad now well just you wait and see what they're going to get like. You've got the situation with housing, you've got the situation with the banks; they're all part of the service sector. The creative industries have been second only to the service sector in terms of balance of payments to this country for a long time. We are now at £65 billion per annum and as the service sector plummets, we're going up. And so the Government is talking about how can we change this economy to being more of a creative economy and you're part of that.

Now you can look at that and think is that about just ensuring there are good artworks or any kind of artworks around? Or can you use your skills to kickstart, I don't like the word regeneration, a sector that replaces manufacturing and starts to replace a bust service sector. And yes, you can. We do quite a lot of housing developments all around and part of when you do these housing developments you have to contribute a Section 106 and quite often it's taken away from you and given to the Council to do a piece of artwork. And quite often it end up with some bloody Cormorants – some are in flight, some are half in flight, some are in a little group – what is a gathering of Cormorants called? A flock?



Or you might get the entrance to a housing development – this is amazing – a piece of art in Ashford – now Ashford deserves this! *(laughter)* Not just for delivering shite housing – loads of it. But if it's going to be daft enough to commission an artist to take some money from a house builder and do this for the entrance to a housing development, then bloody hell, it deserves everything it's going to get.



And I'm sure that the artist who did this was well meaning. And I'm sure that the arts officer has a brain on him or her – they haven't shown it, quite clearly!

And I'm pretty sure the artist could do a much better job in so many other ways than deliver that. If you've got a creative mind you can turn it to absolutely anything creative. We'd do a much better job in this country if public space, if buildings, if housing developments, if schools didn't just involve artistic minds in the placing of some nominal piece of art but were actually ingrained in the design process. I think that an artist who was commissioned to do some art at a school could actually put their mind to how the school curriculum worked; not just getting kids doing more art, but how the curriculum was designed and how it worked. And somehow your main job, I think, is to get the artists who you know and love to do more than deliver art. And this country will benefit so much financially as well as socially and artistically.

One of the greatest issues in this country at the moment is civility and social progress. We sold Red or Dead back in the 90s and I wrote this article called the Wimpyfication and Barretification of Britain which was attacking crappy house builders for delivering crappy housing and saying that it was not just about being ugly, which is very important, but it was also doing very bad things socially for us. And I started to link this with the civility and social progress agenda – you know housing is not just about a roof over your head and it's also not about making money, which it obviously isn't at the moment. And it's not just about Architecture either. It's about creative minds and what it's like to have happiness. Housing developments and where we live, in the regeneration of Blackpool, in the regeneration of anywhere is about happiness.

And the people who know most about happiness, in my opinion, are creative minds who grow up and go through school in a very different way. Sometimes it manifests itself being troublesome; sometimes it manifests itself in creating the punk movement or some other movement but normally it's about enjoyment. It's creative minds that created punk and that created every single youth or artistic movement in this country and the reason we do it normally is not to punish ourselves. The majority of what a creative mind thinks is how do we make life better? So that's what we do when we think about places, when we think about any regeneration schemes that we do.

And when we think about any housing developments that we do the first thing that we think about is happiness. And we think about how do we get to that next stage?

Well it's about having a team of people around you who also believe that life is about happiness and smiling. And it's a very difficult concept to get across to architects, believe me! And they think we're bloody hippies and I'm not a hippy at all (*laughter*). I haven't got long enough hair.

I'm also Chair of this thing called Building For Life which is part of CABI – the Commission for the Built Environment. And we did some research which showed that over the last seven years housing developments in the UK – 82% of them are poor or mediocre and 29% of them shouldn't have been built. I've been in this industry now for just short of ten years and when you see the calibre of the people who are actually delivering them, you will see why those figures come up.

You know when you see that they are economists, when there are structural engineers, when there are architects who really sometimes I don't feel they should be part of the creative industries because they are mathematicians, and that's all. And there's a very different thing from building a place from a mathematician's point of view and building it from a creative point of view. And lots of the figures that come up show how more reasons why we have to get involved more and not just do art.

This is the gateway entrance to a town called Swindon which is reasonably successful economically.



This has been built as the main gateway. There's one nice old bit of Swindon which has got a nice old Brewery which has been renovated with nice landscape around it. And you come into Swindon and you see this. Now there are over 600 properties that look like that as you come into Swindon. This one's been built by Barrett's. What's the average of a first time buyer in this country? Yes, 34 or 35. So you're 34 or 35 and this is the only choice of place you've got to go and live. You know £160,000 for a one or two bed roomed flat here. If you're like 34 or 35 and you're not settled down or you're not thinking about settling down, you're not far off your body clock ticking thinking 'well, maybe it's time to have kids soon'. It's about that time.

Bearing in mind that 80% of all the new build housing being built for all these 35 year olds in this country looks like that, how many of you lot would live in there? How many of you do live in a place like that? Does anybody actually want to buy one (*silence*) What did someone say, 'looks like a prison'? (*laughter*)



You can see that straight away because of your brains, but how come that 80% of the housing that's being built is being built? It's because the numbskulls on Planning Committees, Planners who are not...understanding of the word happiness and architects who just do what the house builder says... who do we blame for that? If 80% of the housing we build looks like prisons, who do we blame? You blame the planners. Anyone else blame anyone else?

Not enough money? When those Swindon flats were being built. House builders were making the largest, most obscene profits, that they've ever made. And they were doing it because they could. Does anyone blame the house builders for that? No, you can't blame the house builder. You can't blame the architect either because they've got mouths to feed; it's very hard to make money out of an architectural practice. I would close the business down rather than build something like that. Who has a pension here? Most of you have a pension through working for the Civil Service, yes? Who wants their pensions in this day and age, especially with this credit crunch to be the maximum they can when you retire when you are 60 or 65 so you can go on cruises or pay for your grandchildren's education. Who wants it to be the maximum? All of you; of course you do.

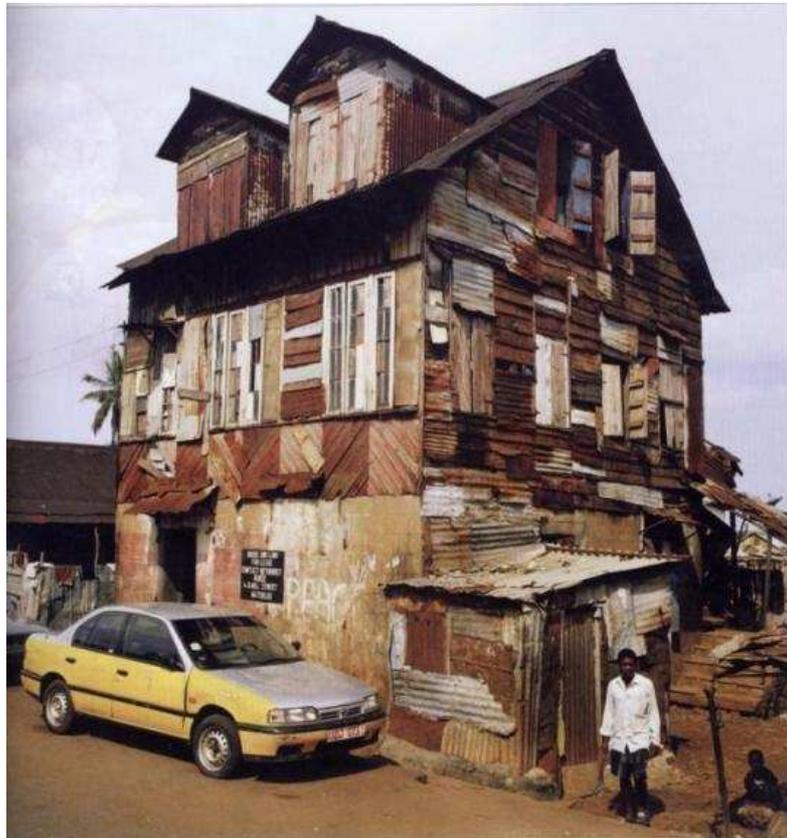
Don't blame the housebuilder then because the housebuilder's job is to use your money to building housing like that – as low a cost as possible and to make the biggest amount of profit. And that's what they've been doing.

So, in one way we can blame us. In another way how could we blame us? It's the Elected Members that are allowing this to happen – precisely. The planners are under-resourced and anyway they have to go to the Elected Members. So, what could you do about that? What can we do about the Members to make sure that this doesn't happen? Change the policy? Any of you, any of you could be a Council Member. It takes nothing to do it. It doesn't cost you a penny. Any of you can do it. You've just got to get yourself elected and that is not that difficult either if you put your heart and soul into it (*loud laughter*). If you're good! If you put your heart and soul into it you can do it. The problem is far too many Councils, far too many towns and cities just rely on the old folk to be members. And you can't blame the old folk for wanting to be members, they've got more time on their hands, their kids have flown the nest, their mortgages might be paid off. They don't have to go and earn the dollar all the time to make their lives. But if we just leave it to people who...

I know from the town that I live in that they are not in touch and so what we are doing is working our bollocks off to get people like us...and we consider getting an artistic mind as part of that decision making process, and to spend the time doing that, rather than doing a sculpture, my God, that will benefit society. And it's not easy. It might sound I'm being flippant about it. But does anybody disagree? And has anybody ever tried to do it? Or tried to promote an artistic mind to be part of the decision making process. I'd be confident about going on any planning committee and showing them there is another way. And I'm not a freak, not the only one; there's loads of people like me. And probably a lot of people out here like me as well who could probably do it.

It's that whole thing about to make things better we have to do more and we have to become political. I think there's real power when you combine an artistic brain with somebody who's very political. That's why we were successful with Red or Dead, but I've not come here to tell, that story. But it was that political mind allied with an artistic mind that did it. The other thing is, think back to that Swindon housing.

About two years ago I took my Mum, who lives just round the corner from here in Garston, to the townships of Cape Town. Has anybody been to a Township in Capetown? (*audience response*) It was deprived but a sense of community. OK.



I left there completely uplifted. I can be quite emotional. I expected to go there and come out really quite depressed. I came out there and I kept thinking, what would I prefer to live in, a community like that where it says I am a number and I can't do anything, where the only bit of green space...because round the back of it is one big sea of tarmac, it's a big car park and where there's no play areas and where all the kids can do is go out and kick a ball on some tarmac and they're going to get in trouble because there's cars are parked everywhere, or they could sit on that bit of grass there. And it just felt like do I want to be a number or did this, the Township mean I had opportunity. I kept looking at it and I kept thinking, well, if one of my kids wanted to open a little shop, it's got it on the side of the house, if we ever wanted to keep chickens, if we wanted to become more sustainable than we are now and grow our own veg, we could do it here.

As we got more money if we wanted to put more windows in it, we could do it. But it said that I had opportunity.

This (*the Township*) is deprived but we are also regenerating lots of deprived areas on the UK. And I think the housing that we are doing is actually going to make the people more deprived whereas these people (*on the Township*) have got the chance to raise out because at least they've got opportunity and freedom and we're taking that freedom away. And again it's us [creatives] that know about freedom. So again when you talk about freedom and you see that [housing Estate] that says 'no ball games' and there are 57 of those on that estate in Aberdeen.

I think this is an argument that any creative mind would try and win. When I went to do a talk in Aberdeen, to the Council there at a Registered Social Landlord conference. And on the way to a talk I'll normally if I've got a bit of time, I'll go and visit what I'm going to be talking about or a local version of it and I'll take some pictures. And I took this picture



and I counted 57 in my quick whiz around this housing development.

And I showed this picture and said this is one of your housing developments and one of the delegates said , 'oh yes, I'm in charge of that.' So I said, 'tell me then why have you put that sign up?'. And she gave me the obvious answer, 'well to stop kids playing football.' But why on a green space that could occupy more than a pitch, it could occupy more than 22 kids, it could occupy 50 kids playing with a football.

Because the ball kept going into the garden of Mrs McGregor's garden at the back of the picture there. So I said, did she have it laid out to veg and plants? No, no I was told, she just had it laid out to concrete and she'd got one of those rotary airers. So I said what was the problem then if the ball kept going in, were they threatening her? No, they weren't threatening her, but she felt threatened with young kids going in her garden. I said, well but that's like terrible that you put the sign up because of that, because what you're possibly doing is pushing these kids into doing something a lot worse for them than playing football in fact it could lead to anti-social behaviour for more people on the development.

And I said why didn't you move her? You've got loads of empty spaces. You could have given her a bungalow you could have done it up, you could have given her somewhere with a Stannah stairlift, whatever she wants, you could have given her a new kitchen somewhere else. And she said 'It's not our policy to move people unless they've done something wrong, and especially old people. She's eighty odd.' I said 'but it's for the good of the community!' I was kind of non-plussed and was getting a bit frustrated at this woman's intransigence. She said, 'well what would you have done?'

And bearing in mind there were about 800 people in this room, and I by then was being quite obstreperous, like I can get, I said well I tell you what I would have done, I would have said 'Mrs McGregor, you're not long for this world, for the good of the community we're going to move you to a house round the corner.' And I got booed off! (*laughter*). And I didn't collect my fee and I got an early flight to get home to the kids so that was alright. But I'd do the same again. And I'm sure that most people in this room would say the same because you've got to think of the wider picture because all the time it's this 'we don't think about health and safety,' the creative mind, it thinks about the positive side of life rather than the negative side.

And yet our lives are being ruled by the negative side. And all we end up doing is a little bit of fussy stuff on the side. You know, 'let's bring an artist in'. And it drives me bloody mad! (*laughter*) Because this is what we would do. That is what we think about.



So we went out doing guerrilla tactics going all around putting these signs up.

And what are these? Young people? Happy people!



I'll tell you what does happen and again that's your minds that have shouted that out. If I'd been in a room of developers and planners what would the words have been?

Chavs would have been the word. It always gets shouted out and I say, people having a good time – young people – because that’s what they are.

And yet how many of us if we go into our town centres at night to go to Pizza Express or something on a Friday night - and there’s six of those lads giving it large in a Pete Tong style on the pavement – how many of us feel a little bit uncomfortable?

I do, I think it’s only natural you know you do feel a little bit threatened. But I don’t blame these kids. You know they’ve been given ‘No Ball Game’ signs.



They’ve been given five fucking springing chickens to play on (*loud laughter*). And yes, I can see the art in this I can imagine entering the Turner Prize dressed as a chicken rocking slowly on it, five people rocking slowly on it. But it’s not art. You know, we allow Council play officers with hardly a brain in their head to deliver that. And we’re happy then with some Cormorants taking off.



It's a really simple equation. Five springy chickens equals ten chavs to the power of two. (*laughter*). Stuff that up the mathematicians arses! I've got loads I could go on with, but I'll finish on this one shall I? There's loads more I could talk about. I've probably gone about 25% through my slides but never mind.



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This is the kind of play area that we deliver in our housing developments now.



When we showed a picture very much like this to one of the planning authorities we were working with a few years ago, you know me and my wife were sitting there and saying ‘you know, we’re sick of this springy chicken lark’. We want to deliver play areas that feel natural, where kids can be creative where they can peel the bark off trees and find a woodlouse and squash it, you know it’s good fun doing that, and where they can balance and fall off and where they can play in sand. And they said, ‘Oh we love your ideas about community and we agree with the things you are saying about the damage that’s being done with too much health and safety, but you can’t have a play area with sand all on the ground’.

And I thought immediately, oh he’s on about dog shit again. So I said, well we’ll put a fence around it to stop the dogs coming in. He said ‘no, it’s not about that, it’s about sand...’ And I said ‘what are we on about?’ And he said ‘well babies will crawl around and eat the sand’. And I said, ‘that’s not a problem, we can replace it, it’s only £1.99 a bag at B&Q’.
(prolonged laughter)

And you know, we've all been to the beach, you know, your kids, or even us or our nieces or whatever have been there and had their egg butties for dipping it in the sand and eating it. And we're there with our sun dried tomato and mozzarella and rocket ciabattas. And we're thinking if we get one piece of sand in our sandwich, ooh I'll throw up! But what's the worst thing that happens to the kids? They get bad shit for a couple of nights. They don't die. (laughter)



I could go on and on about this stuff but I'll leave you with this slide. This is how important what we do is. This is really, really important. I can't bear the fact that the Americans, of all people, can put on the front of the world's most influential magazine – Time Magazine – “British Youth, Unhappy, Unloved and Out of Control. An epidemic of violence, crime and drunkenness has made Britain scared of its young. What's causing the crisis?” Well some of the things I've showed you are some of the things that are causing the crisis.

People say, 'it's education'. From nought to the age of 16 what percentage of time do you think people spend in education at school? You're right, 15%. So kids spend 15% of their time at school and 85% of it is spent in the environment where they grow up.

And the environments we give them are absolutely shite. Is it any wonder that we came bottom of the UNICEF study of child well-being? Is it any wonder that 18% of the British prison population is made up of under 18s. The next highest in Europe is 8%. We're worse than the bloody Americans! And we've got to do something about it. That's what the creative mind can do. Thanks for listening.