

# High Cross House

an international centre for ecological arts and radical thought



**H**IGH CROSS HOUSE was built in 1932 as a home for one of the country's most radical educational thinkers, commissioned by two of the world's richest philanthropists with their own radical agenda to transform rural living. The house has experienced mixed fortunes, but remains an architectural and symbolic jewel.

## Frame

When the house was built the world was descending into darkness with economic, social and political crises fomenting National Socialism, new empire building and mass migrations on a scale hitherto unimagined. The parallels to today are eerie and unsettling.

Dartington then responded by reaching out; today we need to do the same. We propose an arts-led centre for 'ecological thought' (to paraphrase Morton) where holism, open thinking, outward-looking internationalism, sharing, generosity, dialogics and a 'praxic opening out' (Bookchin) nurture not just a radical and responsive arts practice, but create a place for thought development and question-asking.

Dartington has historically led on new arts practices: the ecological arts practice we will re-imagine and push forward is essential to our time, urgent and responsive to a planet in crisis.

But Dartington, too, has historically led with broader new ideas that helped shape society and daily living. Radical thought and innovative problem-solving have an important place in the new High Cross House.

## Proposition

We envision High Cross House as a centre for ecological practice and radical thought. The house will host artist residencies, short course learning and development intensives, extended learning for postgraduates and researchers, and a gallery featuring

the world's best ecological art.

When we talk about 'ecological arts' we are referring to a very broad field of practice not about ecology in the scientific sense but as a way of being in the world: ecological art is a way of expressing our thoughts about the planet and the challenges it faces. This is contemporary art that looks outward, not inward, integrates rather than alienates and is an absolute rejection of the modernist 'me' and the cult of the individual.

The house will also host special gatherings of leading thinkers looking at today's most pressing problems in a place that allows for a moment's pause, a breath, the possibility for enlightenment and radical idea-making.

High Cross House becomes a retreat house for ideas and creation, contemplation, questioning, challenge; not a febrile hot house so much as a cool house for emergent thought, discovery and gaining new insight.

## Financing

We will raise £600,000. £250,000 of this will be used to restore the house to reflect the excellence of its design as a 'machine for living' and to ensure its fitness for its new purpose.

The remaining £350,000 will become the basis of an endowment to support the house in its new life as a centre for international art and ideas.

The money will be raised primarily through single donations of £100,000, £50,000 or £20,000 from a mix of private and public funders.

We believe our proposed usage will generate sufficient income to be financially sustainable.

## Usage

We propose returning the former servants' quarters (the 'Maids' bedroom') into a small apartment to be used





by visiting facilitators, etc. Otherwise we propose no additional accommodation in the house.

The remainder of the first floor is used for residency/workspaces and/or learning spaces (for short courses and our MA Arts & Ecology). We imagine the ability to house up to four residencies at any given time (with one primarily outdoors).

We need to explore a library space, to house the CCANW collection and make it available to others. There is therefore the potential to re-house some of the Dartington Archive and make it accessible although major considerations about proper storage, staffing, security, care, etc. make this feel unrealistic.

The café area will be retained as either a public or in-house place for serving food, with the possibility of a small specialist bookshop. Our inclination however is to retain this space for in-house use only, primarily self-catered and as a space for an external caterer to provide meals for special gatherings. A public café feels like a distraction and a detraction from purpose and seems unlikely to be a useful income generator.

The ground floor remains largely as-is, with the gallery walls and lighting retained, the dining room used for boardroom-style meetings or sharing of food or other gatherings. The former study will be used as an administrative office for art.earth, CCANW, and the house, and the former garage as an installation space or creative lab. The living room remains a multi-use space.

## Art

Much of the ground floor is a space for showing art. We are currently developing an associate curator programme, designed to develop the next generation of contemporary art curators. The gallery will showcase the best ecological contemporary art from across the world, designed and marketed as selling shows.

We will also solicit permanent works for the outdoor

space from key artists in the field such as David Nash, Andy Goldsworthy and Richard Long as part of their contribution to the establishment of this important centre for contemporary arts. Other spaces will show selections from Dartington's collection, on a rotating basis.

Arts & Ecology is a field of thought, an existential practice, a way of being. It is neither a style nor a denial nor a way of communicating environmental ideas. There is currently no gallery of significance in the world showing this work exclusively, and despite the fact that High Cross House was not designed as a gallery space, we believe the appropriateness of showing this art in a light-filled domestic setting that is itself a work of art could not be more appropriate.

The new High Cross House, as a centre for art and ideas is international in outlook and practice, reaching out to the best artists, curators and producers from across the world.

## Ideas

But the house is also a place of retreat and idea-generation for groups of leading thinkers, policy-makers, influencers and society-shapers from many other spheres. It is a place where the next generation can hone their ideas and explore new ways for us to live and to co-exist. We will retain time within the overall schedule to allow these meetings to happen three or four times each year.

## The Dartington context

As art.earth we want to be part of Dartington's fabric, working collaboratively and co-operatively and overtly delivering on the Framework.

The Arts team is developing new ideas around visual arts and artist residency / development. Where the fit is right, we want to develop a fully integrated and



intrinsic partnership with this work.

Schumacher College is a centre of transformative thinking and learning already operating a model for community task-sharing and living. It seems logical therefore to utilise their accommodation and food provision, presenting an opportunity to become part of this important crucible of ideas.

## The ask

Given our commitment to raising the funds necessary for renovations, we would ask for a staged reduction in leasing costs for five years. This will allow us time to build up our programme to the point of full financial sustainability.

We will require a minimum 30-yr lease with a preference for 50 years.

We additionally propose a no-cost testing period for nine months, starting this autumn. Occupying the house in its current condition we would trial a number of event models, primarily as a way of testing markets but also as a way of continuing to build profile.

## Timing and next steps

If given a go-ahead in September we intend to raise

the first £250,000 by the spring of 2017, and the remaining £350,000 by the end of 2017.

We would hope to move in 'proper' once renovation work is complete, in time for a launch event in September 2017.

## Who are we?

**Richard Povall** is an artist, researcher and educator widely known and recognised for his work in this field. **Clive Adams** is a renowned curator who nurtured the early careers of many of the most prominent artists in this field. Both have extensive experience of working internationally.

**art.earth** is a family of artists and organisations whose work focusses on contemporary arts and ecology, the environment, the natural world. We're like a family because we're all different and we all have differing views; we're not like one because anyone can be invited to join. But we are family by choice with a shared ethos and a shared commitment to the planet on which we all live. art.earth is a registered charity (application pending).

**The Centre for Contemporary Art & the Natural World (CCANW)** has for more than a decade created exhibitions, commissions and projects and has a record of continuous support from Arts Council England and partnership working. CCANW is a registered charity.

## Contact

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**CCANW**

Centre for Contemporary Art  
and the Natural World

in association with

**Schumacher  
College**