

Transcript of Panel Discussion
held on 02.05.2003 in the
Huntly Hotel

on the subject of
RURAL COMMERCE

Jim Brook: Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen, and welcome to this event hosted by Deveron Arts and thank you to the panel for taking part in this. I will now hand you over to Robert Livingston, who is in the chair for tonight's proceedings.

Thank you very much.
(applause)

Robert Livingston: Good evening, everyone. Good evening and welcome to Question Time, I'm Jonathon Dimbleby. No, sorry start again: It does rather feel like that. It's wonderful to see such a large audience here this evening and to present to you such an unusual, I think, and varied panel of speakers. The format is that we are going to have a discussion amongst ourselves, so to speak, for the first part of the evening and see what issues come out of that and then open it up to the floor and give you a chance all to get involved. So, if you are itching to get in there during the first hour or so, don't worry, you will get your turn. To introduce everybody along the table here, starting on my far left: Some of these faces will be well-known to you, some perhaps not: some are local, some of us are visitors: Euan Shand, a whisky merchant here in Huntly; next to him, Anne Lamb, proprietor of Orb's Bookshop, again, here in Huntly. Then Ian Dunlop, Chief Executive of Aberdeen and Grampian Tourist Board: Eva Merz, Artist in Residence and of course, only begetter of the Empty Shop project: I am Robert Livingston, Director of Hi-Arts which is based in Inverness and is H-I, not h-l-g-h arts: on my right, Mark Ellington, musician, does not want to be called cultural activist, consultant, you name it: and then carrying forward, Phillip Morrison, director of Rizza's Ice Cream here in Huntly, Ian Hunter, who is director of the organisation Littoral, and, I am told, a campaigner for the arts and rural issues, based, I think in Yorkshire, Ian?

Ian Hunter: " Lancashire!"

(laughter)

And last, but by no means least, **Bill Morton**, Senior Director of Operations from Scottish Enterprise in Glasgow. So as you see, a very varied and I think interesting range of people for our talk.

I am going to say a few words myself then hand over to Eva, to say a bit about her work here in the town and the project and then we will start on the general discussion and, can I also just remind everybody, if you haven't, to switch off mobile phones?

Having sat on one of these platforms myself and had my own machine go off, I know what it feels like.

(laughter)

In recent years, there has been a shift in definitions. Instead of talking about public art or community art, people now tend to talk about art in public places, arts in the community and I think that's interesting, because it means that you are not trying to define or limit art or the arts, you are saying that this is the arts in a particular context. And the standard view of the role of the arts in a town or in a city context would be that they are there for beautification, entertainment, and maybe for education. But, have we got a role in terms of economic impact? I think they have in terms of promotion in terms of the identity of the town or village.

*Andy brings Eva a drink
There's service for you!*

Eva: "Thanks!"

Non of the rest of us get a drink!

They have in terms of integration – of achieving perhaps a shared aim or purpose, and they have in terms of job creation, and that other big "must" term, that's around, which I'm sure will come up in the course of the evening, "the creative industries."

Deveron Arts has as its strap-line, "the town is the venue", and I think that's a very interesting approach...the idea of the venue for arts as opposed to the activity happening, wherever. An arts' venue as we've seen with many created in the last years with the lottery can be a landmark, but that landmark can easily become a white elephant. It can be a flagship, but it can also be a major drain on resources. It can be a symbol, but it can also be a symbol of exclusion. It can be a stimulus, but it can also be a limitation on activity. But to have the idea of the town as the venue depends on accepting a pretty broad definition of the arts, and not, as I had in one meeting recently, saying that the idea that if it is not made by the artist to a high degree of technical skill, it's not art. It also, I think depends on an inclusive definition of the arts: the definition can include amateurs, professionals, the trained and the aspiring. Maybe some of the questions that will come up this evening are: How does Huntly want to be known? How can Huntly be distinctive? This is a competitive world, competitive market. I mentioned lottery funding earlier and in this notion of "the town is the venue", and tonight's more specific theme, Empty Shop/Modern Monument. The lottery has had some interesting, some positive and some negative impacts. Where I work in the Highlands and Islands, in Nairn and subsequently in Forres there has been a project called "The Big Shop", which, just like Eva's has been looking at a high street denuded and empty shops. There it tackled it through the performing arts. And the audience moved

from converted shop to converted shop experiencing a different performance in each space. Then you've got small towns like Ullapool and Portree that have really turned themselves around in terms of their energy. They are communities of tourism through achieving a multiplicity of venues - not one big arts flagship, but a range of places where things can happen, not all of them arts venues, but places where the arts can appear. Go out to one of the remote parts of Scotland. Taigh Chearsabagh, in the Uists and you find an arts centre there that is a reflection of the wider community. There has been an incredible drive up there to regeneration in that community. Or down south, in Birnam, a town, I think probably not dissimilar in size, including Dunkeld, to Huntly where the creation of a cultural institute has made Birnam and Dunkeld a focus for the whole surrounding community, where people from much larger cities and towns such as Perth and Pitlochry are coming there regularly. And then you go to Glasgow, and, as I was just discussing with Mark, you see something like the CCA, the Centre for Contemporary Arts, the recipient of the biggest single lottery grant ever given by the Scottish Arts Council. - a white elephant, a fortress, a monument, a gateway. You can choose your definition. So, there's a lot of issues here, and the work that's happening in Huntly fits into a much larger context. Some of the speakers this evening will touch on that. But, enough from me. I'd like to ask Eva now to say a wee bit about her work in Huntly and about the project itself.

Eva Merz: OK!

Yeah, many of you already know a bit about how I came to Huntly and all that. But it's a long story cut short. I am in Huntly first of all, because I wanted to go to Scotland and I had got in touch with Deveron Arts. I responded to their brief They had put out this idea of working with the empty shops in Huntly. I responded to that, because I imagined this small town, full of empty shops, and I thought that was in the first place a big, big opportunity for me, like, lots of empty shops and you could just do whatever you want to do in there and, fill them up with anything. So, I sent a proposal and they responded to that and blah, blah, blah, - blah, blah, blah! And a year, almost a year, went by and I came to Huntly. The first thing I noticed was that Huntly was a busy little town. I was almost disappointed! There were no empty shops!

(laughter)

And I thought, what can I do? But of course it was in between all the busy shops that there are some empty shops. So I was supposed to work with empty shops and I grant that. You see I don't know anything about business, I don't have any education around that. I only have my personal background.

I am myself from a small town. I grew up in a small town about the size of Huntly.

Back then. It was about the size of Huntly. It was not a farmers town, it was a fishing village, but these two different, you know, can have some of the same issues. In my home town, my daddy was a grocer and third generation, old family company and his shop closed down when the first supermarket came to our little town. So, I had this experience, and looking at Huntly was like, not exotic or different or anything from where I come from. It was the same issues and I thought it was easy for me to understand. And then, I went ahead. Of course, when I came here, I knew I had four months for my project and that it was going to end up with a panel discussion and an exhibition and a publication, which you will see in a month. So, what do you do then when you come to this foreign place? You can do anything, there were lots of possibilities and I had a bunch of ideas. I could mention some of them.... I could take the empty shops. I started off photographing all the empty shops in Huntly: there was like 13 or 15 or something and some of them were nice, some of them were ugly, some of them were beautiful even, beautiful shopfronts. Some of them were sad, whatever, and I had ideas like filling up an empty shop with sheep *(laughter)* and I had another idea together with my friend Jim from "Delicate AWOL", about letting the band – they are a jazzband – about locking them into an empty shop *(laughter)* and then letting them play a gig during shopping hours in Huntly, and – all kinds of ideas, sound installations and so on and so on and so on... And after the first month and a half or something when I had been working on all these ideas I realised that time is short, you know you have to focus on something, you can't do all of it, otherwise I would have to stay in Huntly for years and years and years... and..... I don't want that!

(laughter)

So, I chose actually the first thing that caught my eye in Huntly, it was the most beautiful shop of them all – empty shop of them all – which is the one you've seen in the exhibition, and I chose that, I think, not because it's sad that that shop is empty, but more out of the idea that it's wonderful to have a building, something that looks like that, and also, a lot of my work has been about doing research, being a foreigner, not knowing anything about the town's history, I had to go and meet people and ask my questions and get to know about the town. And I got all my information from local people and I must say that I am really, really amazed that so many people have helped me and been interested in what I was doing here. And so it also came to my knowledge that a lot of people worry about the supermarket issue. So – that's about the future, and you can't avoid that. That's another thing that I noticed when I came over here, that supermarkets are much bigger in Britain, I think, than they are in Denmark. So, that's the future. So, I thought, ok, this is a question about looking into the future and what's going to happen and to develop. So, if you are going to do that, you also have to look at your history, what's your background and what you want to preserve, what you want to care for. And that's why I chose that building, because it is just outstanding. And I think it was almost accidental: the first weeks I was in Huntly, I went around the town and photographed with a little snapshot camera and I took this image that you see in the exhibition very early. And I worked a little on photoshop with my computer and by accident – I don't know how it happened! – but anyway, the sky turned red and I saw – here we have a monument: it's a monument, it looks like the castle, it has the same strength. And then I thought, well maybe the way the development goes, maybe in twenty years, we won't see anything like that, anywhere, so the idea of having a monument like that is actually not strange at all, if you look at it that way. And I guess I just... when I finally realised that I couldn't do all the funny and great projects, I'll hold on to this because this is really, really important and really good. And I believe in that, and so it carried on, and on and on. And things always change because, being in the town and also wanting to work with people and communicate with local people means that when I meet people and they tell me something, and I come up with an idea or whatever, I change too. I didn't have

a settled idea when I came here, so it's a long process. But not long enough, because the only frustrating thing about this, is that it is ending today. I could have kept gone on with this, because it is a really serious and important thing that we are talking about. So, that's the only thing that is not good about this. I mean I am happy about it, but the more questions you get an answer for, the more new questions you raise. It could just go on and on and on. And it's good – yeah!

Robert: Thank you, thank you Eva

(Applause)

I am reminded by what you say, as a Glaswegian, of the fuss many years ago when the National Trust for Scotland took on the Tenement House and the notion that this great cultural institution should be seeking to preserve, you know, a single end and. you know...**Why?** And now, of course, you know it is one of the most known and most loved facilities in whole of the NTS. Well, I think, just to start off, it would be interesting to get the responses from the panel from those who are living here in Huntly and who are, one hopes, successful retailers and proprietors within the town. Starting on the far left then, Euan, what's your reaction?

Euan Shand: I'm the newest!

(laughter)

Robert: That means you bring the freshest views.

Euan: What's my reaction to...?

Robert: ... the project. To what Eva has described and to the project as you've seen it.

Euan: Well as we discussed earlier, the project has certainly brought awareness to Huntly. It appeared on "Reporting Scotland" the other day and people are noticing Huntly, but, long term, once Eva goes, who is going to continue? Possibly nobody.

Robert: Phillip, on the other hand, yours is a family firm which has been here for what? Three generations?

Phillip Morrison: Yes, three generations

Robert: What has been your reaction to the project?

Phillip: Well, again, as Euan has said, it has brought attention to Huntly but it could be on the negative side. As I said on television – I was given a 14 minute interview on television and it was cut to 14 seconds – but, what I was trying to get over to BBC Scotland was, it was a year too late. When Eva, when Deveron Arts obviously asked Eva to come, there was so many shops empty. I think Huntly has turned that corner. The area it was filmed in was the old commercial side of Huntly. Down at Bogie St. there used to be quite a lot of shops. The old mart was down there: we had the station, the railway station used to be the hub of Huntly because all the transport came in there and you had these little three wheelers, little artics, after Beeching, used to go round and deliver all round the community. So that area was quite a hub. The commercial side of Huntly moved up into Gordon St. and the Square, so the shops up there are actually filling and the last two shops, one in Gordon Street. And one on Deveron Street, are actually filling as we speak, so it has brought awareness to Huntly but maybe on the negative side. Because I don't portray Huntly as a town of empty shops. I portray it as a very busy commercial town with very good quality shops that are bringing quite a lot of people....You speak to people who come to Huntly.... I know as a business that I couldn't sustain my business by relying on the people of Huntly to shop there, we had to move out. But if you look at the likes of Boyds and you look at TV Services, Cruickshanks in the Square and other very good businesses, the amount of people who like to come to Huntly to shop and they say that they like Huntly and it has good shops and maybe the TV portraying Eva going up a ladder sticking a flag up empty shops has portrayed Huntly as not doing very well commercially, so I would like to kind of put that over that it could be negative, what has happened.

Robert: Anne, you have a shop, which itself is a cultural shop, a book shop, what have you felt about the project?

Anne Lamb: Well, I felt - when I finished reading the paper about the empty shop art project - distinctly miffed, I was peeved OK? Because, I thought, here I am desperately trying to keep a shop full and I have succeeded in filling it with books at least and it seemed to me a pity not to mention that some people are trying to fill shops. But as I thought about the questions that you have given us and try to think about them objectively and analyse what I really think, I realise that Eva's project has thrown down the gauntlet and made people focus on what might or might not be a problem. I think it has made people more aware of themselves and of their community, so that they can either get up on their hind legs and say "horsefeathers woman! – there isn't an empty shop problem in Huntly" or just say "oh yes, you know, the shops in Huntly aren't what they were", which is often what I hear people say, I have to say which has been a change for me, I had an impulsive response, followed by a more considered one which is that I think she has encouraged us to look objectively at ourselves.

Robert: Ian Hunter, you must see through your work the wider picture of this kind of intervention. What are the cultural impacts, the cultural links between keeping small towns alive and the role of the arts within that?

Ian Hunter: Well, if I could start by saying. When I was first asked to come up here in the context of this, I think, artists working in rural areas, though Huntly is a fair sized town, I take your point there, I was thinking, well, you know where we live in Lancashire, its not just a rural problem of sort of small rural hinterlands losing their economic base because of the draw of big cities... we live in east Lancashire, I mean these out of town shopping centres have

sucked the life out of our town centres – literally have had the lifeblood sucked out of them. I'm not talking about 4 or 5 shops but about 15 - 20 in small villages and towns around Burnley and it's just absolutely awful. The baker is gone, the greengrocer is gone. The insurance companies move all the financial service agencies out. They are like ghost towns and you have these huge hubs. So it's not just a rural problem, it's an urban problem. It is driven by, obviously, globalisation. But to shift back to Huntly, and what is happening here, I think the restructuring of the rural economy is a really important, issue, and what we are also looking at in working with the English Arts Council is this whole impact of the change in agriculture and how that's impacted on our rural communities and rural towns. So I take your point about maybe misrepresenting, because, we drove around Huntly. It's the first time that I've come here and, you know, you don't have that many empty shops. It's exactly as you describe it. I can take you around towns in Lancashire and you would cry. I mean, there are still bits of Liverpool that have never recovered from the seventies. So, it's a relative thing... I think Huntly has nothing to worry about. But the role of the artist as a catalyst is an excellent one, and I think it has opened up a very important debate.

Robert: Presumably Ian, turning to the other Ian, Ian Dunlop, there is a tourism impact too in the distinctive identity of individual towns and encouraging people to pick up on that?

Ian Dunlop: Yes, tourism is an important economic sector throughout Scotland and is important to Aberdeen and Grampian and by virtue of the fact that there are people moving around and visiting places, important to Huntly. But, the question, I would turn it around, about tourism being some sort of panacea for any kind of change and improvement in any sort of situation. It is not necessarily that: it is certainly not the thing you turn to to replace something that is lost. Tourism really should be much more about keeping that and keeping something, keeping hold of something and, Bob... could I go to the audience a bit and ask the audience questions, because you know, I would like to do that?. Tourism is defined as a trip – anywhere – any sort of trip is defined as tourism. So how many people have taken a trip, sorry, how many people have **not** taken a trip in the past twelve months? Everybody, everybody has.....

From the Floor: Christel: My legs won't carry me....

(laughter)

Basically, you know, we all go somewhere else for some reason and we don't do it by accident. We don't just make a choice and just go somewhere. There is something that has to draw us in and it is all about what is unique, what is... what would draw in people You know I know Huntly, I don't know it particularly well, but it's a lovely wee town, it's a super wee place, it's got some real character about it. It's got some lovely buildings, etc, etc, but what, I am asking you, what is unique about it?

Euan: I think you need to ask everybody where they have taken a trip to... Did they take it to Huntly? Did friends come to Huntly? I mean, if you stimulate tourism in Huntly, how do you do it? You are from the VisitScotland, how are you getting people to come to Huntly?

Ian: I'm not from VisitScotland, I'm from Aberdeen and Grampian.

Euan: Well, It's the same.....

Ian: No it's not!

(laughter)

Euan: Its not? So how many tourist boards do we have?

Robert: One national, one in a series of areas

Euan: Is that right! And are they linked?

(laughter)

Ian Dunlop: Yes to a certain extent

Euan: And how are they linked?

Ian Dunlop: Through funding and through various....

Euan: So why so many boards?

Ian: Well, there's a job to be done to create tourism to the UK, there's a job to be done to create tourism to Scotland through two agencies, then there's a job really to make sure that there are services on the ground and that people come to various parts of the country. Our job is specific to Aberdeen and Grampian.

Euan: Personally, I think that tourism is such a major thing in this country.... I was in Austria last week and that whole country survives on tourism. And it's a very, very rich country. Great culture, arts and everything is well highlighted. Scotland could do the same, but I've got a gut feeling, travelling a lot, that our tourist industry is shot to pieces.

Ian :very interesting...

(laughter)

.... Tourism is

Euan: I could rattle off some facts, which I'll do in a minute...

Ian: Yes thanks!

(laughter)

Tourism is worth £500 million per annum to the local economy. And I think you have to say that secondly a little bit slower – five hundred million pounds. That is a lot of income coming into the local economy. It's also regarded....

Phillip: Excuse me... you are asking for questions here... how do you quantify that? How can you go out and make a statement and say that £500 million is coming into the local economy, because on different tourist things that's been done round the north east of Scotland, we've had consultants that have come up and said that this will quantify £60.000 or £100.000 or a million pounds but how do you go out and count that? Because the Balmoral race was ... it was quantified how much money that was going to bring in to local tourism and to the different hotels but the money they were actually speaking about... I would like just as a question to listen to how much this is doing. How do you quantify it? Is that completely correct?

Ian: Yes, yes

Phillip: Well, how do you do it?

Ian: It's done on two methods. It's done on a top down method which is a thing called the International Passenger Survey which tells us how many overseas visitors come into the country and they are surveyed so that... to where they go and then it's apportioned to various destinations throughout the country. And there's also another top down survey which is within the United Kingdom and then apportioned down on various surveys that are done. But, far more importantly, there is another, more localised survey done which is called the Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor, which is based on returns that are brought in by all the transport carriers, all the passenger operators, a huge number of hotels that put in numbers of the people that are staying, and the various indices that are then applied to that have been shown across various surveys to be very accurate. So £500 million. But I think one thing that you have to take back is this question of what is tourism. Tourism is defined as a trip away from home, so a trip into - if I stay overnight in Inverness, that is tourism. The reason for me going to Inverness doesn't necessarily have to be a holiday, it could be a business trip, so there is a fair amount of different types of tourism that have to be defined within that. It's not all about people taking holidays, which we traditionally see tourism to be. Tourism is much wider than holidays; it is much wider than business or corporate trips. It does include things like days out, activity days, visits to various activities etc. It is a much wider industry than just the holiday industry. It is much more than that.

Robert: I'm going to draw a guillotine there; otherwise we end up becoming a panel on tourism. I am going to pass to Bill Morton. I know the big distinction between the agency I work for, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the agency you work for, Scottish Enterprise, is that Highlands and Islands has a social remit, which means that it can spend money on the arts for the arts' sake. In the Scottish Enterprise context, where do you see the arts fitting into the economic development side?

Bill Morton: You are actually quite right and I think it is the case that there is a link between community art and economic development. I mean it is the case and that has been established a long time ago. It is true that it is not part of Scottish Enterprise's remit to directly promote community arts, but I do think from the point of view of localising the community and using that as a focus to raise the profile of areas like Huntly, that's a very productive thing to do in terms of economic development. I actually, ... I think it's true to say, even when I lived up in Aberdeen for a short time, I can't remember a previous reference to Huntly, other than seeing it on television just the other day on Reporting Scotland. That's really good and there is a very novel connection between art and empty shops. But you have to be very, very careful that that is used positively and constructively, because it did sell the message, everywhere apart from Huntly, that this is a community where the commercial core was basically on it's knees. There is a risk that that could talk the area down. You talk the area down and you promote a negative image and that makes it harder to attract investment of any form into your community. I came here this evening and I was, I suppose, relieved and a bit surprised to see that I did not actually spot the empty shops. You go down to Lanarkshire or Lancashire and it's finding the occupied shop that's the problem. So you do not have the sort of scale or nature of the problem that occurs elsewhere. By all means in economic development terms exploit every advantage, use every lever to raise the profile, but do so on the basis that there is a positive intent to sell a positive message about the fortunes of this area in the future, not its current problems. Don't use a need-based argument to try to attract investment. It doesn't work.

Robert Livingston: Mark you've been very patient and I've come to you last. What's your thought on it?

Mark Ellington: Well I take what Bill's saying about trying to be positive at all times and also the fact that Huntly is doing relatively well, but I think it's very good that Eva has focussed on this problem. Because it is a problem and it's a problem we're facing all through the North East. You've got real problems in Lanarkshire but go to Fraserburgh – you don't know what problems with empty shops are like till you go to Fraserburgh. Have a look at what's happening in Banff. Have a look at what's happening in Aberchirder. To a greater or lesser degree all of these problems that are impacting on our economy are all at once. And that's the changes in the farming and fishing industry, the downturn in the oil industry and the lack of confidence that can come along with that – uncertainty and change are

creating a real challenge for people in all of rural Aberdeenshire. But the very interesting thing is recognising the very positive thing that these small, well established locally owned shops bring is that they create a sense of identity for a community, a sense of place. They give people a real feeling that this is a town that is distinct and very much its own place. And each little town is very different. If you look at all the towns in the North East, they all have a different character. They've all got a different sense of place and its not just the architecture and the materials they're built of. It's the shops – its all of that. And the very interesting thing is, that if you look at international airports, and shopping malls in America, they are trying to replicate what is here, you know, and if we lose what is here, well then we will get a firm in to kind of create a Disneyworld-type shop environment. But they are great, because the shops have vitality, they give a bit of life, they are a focal point for the whole rural area, people can come in, they can exchange news. Not everyone is able to jump in the car and go off to Tesco's in Inverurie. And they can wander into the shops, and they are a great place for exchanging gossip. I mean, you get gossip in a local shop, I believe, probably much better than you get in Tesco.

(laughter)

And that's really important, so the cultural concept of losing these are really important. And I believe, you know, it isn't the artist's job, with all respect, Bill, to look at whether we are sending out a positive image, because we don't do that anywhere in Scotland anyway. The rest of the world doesn't know much about Scotland. We don't tell the world what happens in Scotland. Most of the world thinks that people in Scotland either live in a castle or on a croft and that we are all living in rural areas. Whereas most people in Scotland live in urban environments. We haven't told people about the fact that we are still an inventive nation, we have an image throughout the world which is not necessarily a challenging image, but it's a wrong image. I think, you know when we talk about images, we have to be very careful and it is not the artist's job to kind of sanitize things. The artist is there to look at things clearly and challenge us to say: this is the way it is, because it's only by looking at things, head on, through another person's view, we can understand where we've come from, where we are, and maybe, how we can get on in the future and that creative process is the only way we can face the problems of the future. And we face a lot of problems in this part of the world in the not-too-distant future and, I think, we are dodging if we don't face the problems that are coming upon us very, very quickly.

Robert Livingston: One of the things you said earlier, Eva, is that a great deal of what you are doing is actually a positive celebration - that it was actually the role of that shop and others like it within the history of the town that made you want to bring it forward. It's very difficult to control the way the media responds to that....

Eva Merz: Yeah, I was just thinking about that..... Well, I just finished my exhibition today and I am in the middle of it all myself, so I haven't had the distance yet to look at it from the outside. But I am listening to what you say and also, I can see from the way the news was presented and as you say, Phil, the way this could be like a negative thing.... Huntly is the empty shop town..... and man! That really sucks because that's not what I wanted you know, it's the total opposite. It's like a celebration of what we had, or what we still have and what we can take care of. And the news, they grasp it and they can easily turn it around to something else. And so, I was thinking, well, what can we learn from that: don't let the TV come and take you when you do an....I don't know, I don't know. I mean, I don't regret anything. I work in my good beliefs. But then I see that it can be... But then again, you know, its good if this can just raise some discussion in Huntly. And I'm not even talking about...Ok we are in Huntly, ok and it's a Huntly shop. It's a wonderful Huntly shop, but I'd like to take it, you know, further and if it can just raise some discussion. And if people get mad about it, get mad at me, that's all right too.

Mark Ellington: It could have been very positive – the last empty shop in Huntly, and it's been immortalised, put it that way!

(laughter)

Ian Hunter: Mr. Chairman, can I just pick up on this anti metro-centric sentiment I'm getting from your cultural critic here - this anti Tesco and anti Sainsburys.

Mark Ellington: Not at all!

Ian Hunter: Oh yes! I'm very hurt by this!

(laughter)

Oh yes, and this thing that Huntly shops provide Huntly people with everything. Well, I know something that Huntly shops can not provide and Tescos and Sainsburys do in Lancashire, and if you go to Tescos and Sainsburys on a Thursday evening between 7.30 and 9.30 and you are single, you will find a partner!

(laughter)

Mark Ellington: Listen! – try down the road at the local baker shop! Try in there!

Ian Hunter: That's just rural propaganda; I'm not having any of that!

(laughter)

Robert Livingston: I think one of the difficulties is that the perception...particularly with television is that for the media arts are always the humorous story at the end, they're the "and finally" item.

From the floor: with animals!

(laughter)

And it's important, I think, to see where other outlets can come, through the more considered media, and where you will start to see the word percolating through in a more considered sense. What Eva has created is an easily transported package that has, as Mark has suggested, relevance for a very wide number of communities throughout Scotland and the UK. Moving on from there, I said at the very beginning, the arts can beautify and they can entertain, but can they do more than that? We've touched a wee bit on what perhaps the arts can do for communities as a whole and to maybe look wider at the aims and roles of Deveron Arts. I come back also to people who are in Huntly first of all. Looking at Deveron Arts as a whole and the programme that has been up to now, what is it doing for Huntly as a town, what could it do for Huntly as a town, what can it do in terms of that identity question that Ian was raising?

Annie, can I start with you?

Anne Lamb: What is Deveron Arts doing for the town? I tend not to notice, I'm sorry. They've been very, very good to me. I'll say that, and they have been very, very active in bringing in a town artist. They had a resident artist before Eva,

and trying to get people to think. And they go to the school, for instance, to try to get young people involved in thinking about art and making art and participating so that's very positive. I think that they have had a knock-on effect of perhaps getting more people to come and look at the books that are available and perhaps ask for things that I could possibly have, you know.

What was the rest of your question?

Robert Livingston: I think you've answered it very well. Philip, I know you have reservations about the present project, but have there been other aspects of Deveron Arts works that you feel have had a positive impact?

Philip Morrison: Deveron Arts – when the question is what have they done for Huntly, they've put Huntly on the map, to be quite honest. Straight away. I actually think the project – as I said before, - when you see the photograph, the project is superb, I think. The postcard itself and the idea of promoting that certain shop is good because it is a beautiful shop, it is a beautiful site as well. It was just the fact that that shop was never for sale. That was an empty shop from choice. The shop closed a year after the supermarket came to Huntly as did quite a number of shops, because we had a fantastic grocers shop in the Square where the TSB is, which was Howiesons. So all the grocers shops closed because of the supermarket situation, coming in. But Deveron Arts on the school project that has been done, if it is making awareness of art..... I like looking at pictures, I like looking at art. I don't really understand modern art. I have been taken round plenty things in the south of France by my wife and looking at things that she thinks are wonderful, and I think, well, fair enough!

(laughter)

I had my mother-in-law with me and she agreed with me! So...

(laughter)

that was a plus! But, no, no, I think that Deveron Arts on the question have brought Huntly into the actual media. Bill said that he hadn't really seen much of Huntly but in the Millennium 2000 we had a Gordon reunion in Huntly which as a homecoming to Huntly, and it was a fantastic event. Everybody in Huntly had a feel-good factor. It brought thousands of people to Huntly. The only negative thing about it was, we lost money and this seems to be the thing, we could have turned round as you said... it brought, according to the people that came up and looked at it, it took something like £60 – 70.000 into the community. I think it was more than that they came out with, but we still lost money and we had to beg, borrow and steal to get out of that. So Huntly has been in the media before. But Deveron Arts, I think, if this is going to stimulate people to speak about Huntly, Deveron Arts has done its job.

Robert Livingston: Euan, as somebody who has recently started a business here, what would you like to see the organisation doing to benefit you?

Euan Shand: Well, I'm very pleased with the publicity we've had in town in the last few days, but I don't know how it's going to go from here. I mean, I don't know enough about Deveron Arts. Is everybody familiar with Deveron Arts in here, or am I the only person that doesn't know about it?

(laughter)

Euan: I have no idea how it is funded, I have no idea how it runs...Is it a totally private thing? What is its sole purpose? Is it purely to promote the arts in Huntly, or the arts further afield? Has it got a commercial link? There are so many questions, I mean; I am not enough in Huntly because I travel a lot, to know about it. Maybe it needs somebody from Deveron Arts to explain a little about Deveron Arts.

Robert Livingston: Well, there's a challenge..... Claudia?

From the floor: Jonathan Claxton: Well I don't think it really matters what Deveron Arts is. It is just part of a cultural diversity and choice of things that can go on in any community and that's just part of the richness of being in a community. We move around, we take things somewhere and set up where we want to do things, whether we are artists or normal people, or whatever...

(laughter)

sorry!

Christel: How can we join it? How can we be part of it if we don't know what it is?

Jonathan: Yes, you can be part of it because you are part of this community, we all are part of this community in some way or another, whether we visit or whether we live here. We bring something, we take something away with us.

Euan: Surely you've got a responsibility to communicate with people, though.

From the floor: Caroline Ross. What is this? This is that.

Euan: As an example of the community, we are canny Aberdonians and Huntly folk and the arts is maybe a wee bit alien to us.

Jonathan: But the Vikings came to Scotland, they toured round the coast and brought their own culture.

Euan: They raped and pillaged!

Jonathan: Everybody moves around at some stage or other, it's part of what life is about... No end of Scots have settled around the world and have taken their expertise to other places. It's just.... I don't know how important it is, but I know it's just about moving around and taking that richness, new ideas. It might be new industry, but it might be new ideas...

Robert: Mark? What would you like to say on that?

Mark: What Deveron Arts does is raise an awareness and understanding of the arts and the cultural process. I think also, we've got to remember, it's not just the arts, it's culture in its broadest sense and whether it's a local company manufacturing a product to sell or it's tourism, anything that can enhance the image, identity, the kind of brand profile of Huntly has got to be very positive. And interestingly enough, if you've got a product, if you take whisky, for example, I mean, we were hauled in some years back by Chivas Brothers to look at the brand values that were supporting some of their product and we have done the same for two of three other companies... the interesting thing is that the values of culture, heritage, craftsmanship – all of these values, which are right in with culture and with creativity have real commercial value, because if you just put something on a shelf it means nothing, but if you can say creativity has gone into it, culture has gone into it, there is something beneath the bubbly foam that kind of supports it and gives it value and identity, it really helps. And I think any group within a community that can be kind of keeping the creative process to the fore is extremely useful. It isn't just, you know, the group that puts on art exhibitions, it should be part and parcel of everyday life: the way the town is promoted, what visitors come here for. And remember, visitors do not necessarily come to Scotland for the weather and the food. They come here for our culture. And the other thing that we must remember is the culture is not just about contemporary arts, it's right back to what happened at the palace down the road here, its what happens in Duff House, it's all of these things. And culture is a hugely important activity in Scotland. More people visited historic buildings open to the public in Scotland last year than all sporting events combined. Culture is a huge business. It supports our tourist industry, it provides identity for our products, it provides a sense of identity for the people. So, it is terribly important. This is very, very serious stuff and having groups like Deveron Arts and these local community based arts groups is incredibly important.

Robert: Ian, turning that on it's head, is there a danger for the arts in getting into bed with these other areas?

Ian Hunter: Well perhaps... it's your last comments about creativity and you know, are the artists the only creative and imaginative people around? Well, obviously not: I think it's this idea of indigenous creativity and I was talking to Phillip a moment ago about his ice-cream project. But just very briefly, working with the Arts Council in England, to develop a new rural arts strategy because obviously after foot and mouth, you were lucky, you didn't get so much of it in Scotland, you got a bit, but basically seven billion pounds went down the tubes through loss of business so DEFRA and the Arts Council have got together and we are now working with them to develop a new rural arts strategy. But we, this is the point, persuaded the Arts Council of England not to talk of it in terms of a rural arts strategy, but in terms of investing in rural creativity and that's the business people, the small business sector as well. So if that notion... certainly have your artists out there as catalysts and your arts agencies in towns but I think its local entrepreneurial activity..... Phillip, tell us about these ideas you have for ice-cream, because I think this is "art".

Phillip: I'm sorry, when I sit next to somebody, I always tell them a story... But, to let you understand, in Scotland, we have got something unique. We have got membership of an Ice Cream Alliance, which is 80 people and 60 of them are ice-cream manufacturers. And this is unique, because England doesn't have this....

Ian: We have some ice-cream!

Phillip: But not the same...

(laughter)

What we've done... we've put forward a feasibility study, a development plan and a business plan to Scottish Enterprise and VisitScotland, and we are actually in discussion just now with major companies for sponsorship. We want to do a passport for Scotland. We want to put a passport out for Scotland, a three year passport, so that

anybody that comes into Scotland, visits Scotland can go to an ice-cream parlour where ice-cream is made fresh. They can taste the ice-cream and they can market it. One of the ideas that came out of it was to try and put the fun back into Scotland, into tourism. Everybody that I have spoken to have in their childhood had their ice-cream shop and their favourite ice-cream, so the idea to market it was to get people to visit, and visit their own country. You've got generations now.... My kids especially... I take my holidays in October, I go abroad. My kids don't see Scotland. My fault! But wait till they start delivering ice-cream, they'll see the whole of Scotland.

(laughter)

But, this is a project, I would suspect... I was whispering about it to this gentleman on my right and he seems to think it is so good I should speak about it. So, that's something we are trying to do just now.... Trying to get people to move about Scotland, put the fun back into Scotland and get people to go and relive their childhood really. I've been speaking to a few people tonight and they've all got the names of an ice-cream that they loved. Huntly had three manufacturers and there's always someone, but we've got the Old Italian connection, we've got the new generation of ice-cream, Cream of Galloway, Orkney and Mackies. They have all come in since 1980. So we've got quite a lot of things going. So that's my little art project!

Robert: That brings us very neatly into the last area that I was asked to put to the panel, which is the whole area of investment, which Ian has also mentioned. The Arts are always being accused of being subsidy junkies. Why can't we see the funding put into the arts as investment? We already talked, Bill, about the problems our two agencies have. But, does the investment argument help Scottish Enterprise from where they sit in relation to the arts?

Bill: I think the end product does. Just to go back and clarify something. I wouldn't expect the connection between art or an artist and a place to be the end of it. I think it's the advocacy of the community. It is the strength of feeling from within the community that sells a positive message, hopefully at every opportunity. It is very, very difficult to fund or subsidise art projects as an economic development agency, because, particularly when you use public money you have to account for things that are tangible. For most politicians that means some visible investment – the creation of a business, the expansion of a business, the development of employment income, basically. Bottom line, these things are actually what drive public sector interventions in economic development. But that's not to say that there's not scope for projects like Phillips'. I have to say, I admire Phillip not just for his project, but for the fact that he is generous enough to take his mother-in-law to the south of France.

(laughter)

Phillip: I had no choice!

Bill: Coming from the North-East of Scotland, I find that distinctly unusual. But, you know, it is projects like that, innovative projects where there is an art and a science to the development of a business and if you've got a tangible business that creates economic worth, that is something that the development agencies can actually look at. It is very difficult for a body, unless it is their specifically charged remit, to put public funding into the arts per se, directly.

Robert: Ian how does that affect you from the tourism side? I know your job is primarily to market and service the tourism industry, but is it important that there is investment within the cultural sector to draw those tourists?

Ian Dunlop: Well, I think, yes, absolutely, that's what creates the uniqueness of a destination. And we are faced now with global competition and people have choices and they make choices based on very definite decisions. And they are not going to go somewhere where they feel they are not going to get that experience. People on holiday are not content just to view. They want to be part of that experience and really, in terms of destinations, if a destination can make itself unique through whatever avenue, and it might be the arts, it might be the history or it might be something more modern than that. At the end of the day, the uniqueness comes from people. I think people make a unique destination and, you know, we have them in spades. What I think Mark was alluding to, was that maybe we don't make enough of it, we don't really capitalise on the uniqueness that we have, the culture that we have, the heritage that we have. And, my view is, let's do that, let's bring it together, let's make something of it and things like, you know an ice-cream trail, I think, they are so brilliant in their simplicity. The whisky people, you know, they are not alone, they are working together to make something, and so on and so forth and there is so much of that. And I heard a wonderful expression from an American professor who looks at interpretation: he said "Beware of big budgets and small ideas" and I think that's a wonderful expression. I think if you can bottom up things and bring things from communities, whatever they are. They don't have to be art-based, but you know, community projects are the things that to my mind are the kind of thing to make a destination unique. So the more we have of that, the more we are able to make of it.

Mark: It's quite interesting. If you look at the cultural opportunities we've got here as far as tourism, I mean many other destinations would give their eye-teeth to have what we have. We have the largest concentration of castles in the world. We have probably a better collection of traditional ballads than anywhere in the world. Traditional music and do remember, the arts isn't just things you hang on walls. It's also music, it's dance, it's a whole range of things. And we have unique offerings here. I remember about four years ago we had the chap who was in charge of the Disney set-up in Orlando came to visit us because we were doing some work with the Epcot centre and we drove him around to Fyvie, the Lighthouse Museum, to some of the historic buildings, I remember him saying "It's amazing, how you keep this all a secret! If we had what you have, we would not have built what we've built in a swamp in Orlando!"

(laughter)

But we just don't seem to care about it that much. If you see what other destinations have done – Barbados. We were talking about Barbados earlier with the Mitchells. We've been involved in a project there looking at the heritage of slavery – I mean talk about a difficult one to deal with! And that is a hugely valuable market. There are a lot of people in North America and Europe that are very interested in the heritage of slavery. If you look at the interest in traditional music and the traditional dance and look what happened in Ireland, and I can tell you that it wasn't until very recently that that began to be a central core element in their tourism offering. We have a great opportunity here. What is great for tourism can also benefit the local community by the provision of facilities, the increase in a sense of identity, allowing local people to participate and celebrate their own culture. So the tourism things aren't just what you put on for people coming off an airplane. They are also for the benefit of the community.

Robert: Ian, you wanted to come in...

Ian Hunter: I just think, if I can put my Irish hat on for a minute, the experience of tourism in Ireland. I mean there is a kind of, you know I think tourism, the tourist economy is a transitional economy; it's not the solution: and to talk it up... I mean yes, it's important as part of your portfolio for the development of Scotland, but there is now, believe it or not, an academic discipline called Post Heritage Studies, which is about economies after tourism. So just be careful. And certainly in the Irish context, if you talk to some of the communities on the Greek islands, I mean the sense of the tourist culture basically leaching out, displacing the indigenous culture. You know, it's a debate. But don't talk up tourism. Tourism is a transitional economy. You've got to think beyond it.

Mark: So is oil

Ian: I wouldn't argue with that: forty years and you've got no oil.

Phillip: We in Britain have got an economy after industry because we've no industry left now. We're a consumer country. We buy everything abroad.

Robert: Eva you are coming from another, in population terms, relatively small country with a lot of rural aspects to it. What do you see as the differences and similarities in the approach to the arts and culture? Is there that same subsidy versus investment debate in Denmark?

Eva: That's a good one... I don't know: no no - I don't think so. There is not the same awareness and well, it's a difficult question to answer for me because I have never been in this same situation. I come from Copenhagen. I come from the big arts scene in the cities. I mean I grew up in the rural, small town like Huntly, but I haven't.... No, I think that in Denmark people are more... Maybe people are more easy-going about this whole heritage thing or what can we give to our tourists. It's just, we have the beaches, the weather, maybe. I don't know, it doesn't seem to be a big issue really.

Mark: But you know, as Ian said. It's about people. Very interesting that you come straight back with the Irish thing. Yes I realise that you cannot base everything on tourism and no-one is purporting to promote that. But do remember, if you take the Irish situation, for example, the World Bank did a report on the current economic success of Ireland, and they did it at the end of last year and what the World Bank – these are not arty-farty heritage loonies, - these are grey, boring people in business suits, they said that the key driver in Ireland's current economic success, not a key - **the** key driver in Ireland's current economic success was, not as many of us in Britain like to think, European money. They decided that the key driver was the effective promotion of the culture and values of the people of Ireland. That's the World Bank.

Ian Hunter: I just think that, I mean the myth of the Celtic Tiger - I mean it's ridiculous. I mean, here's Ireland importing people from Eastern Europe to work at slave wages in the tourist industry... Most tourism money goes out of the economy and not only that it has a negative knock-on impact on local creativity. I think there is a cost built in....

Mark: Steady on, steady on!

Ian: No, I think there is... if Huntly.. it has to be part of a portfolio

Mark: Of course it does, that's what we're all accepting. There's a whole range of cultural activity. But I was just quoting that nonentity called the World Bank there. But I think what we have to realise is that culture, in its broadest sense, and creativity in its broadest sense and the values of people in their broadest sense have real, genuine economic value and they also have immense value to the sense of identity of a people and do remember, what's happening in the world now has arisen not just through political problems, the challenges we are facing, but what happens when people have their identities challenged, whether it's in Northern Ireland, whether it's in the Middle East or the Far East. When people start losing an identity, they cease to understand who they are and how they relate to the community and problems can develop. It's a big question but I think we have to look on the positive side and I think, as Ian is saying, there is a real benefit from tourism, but it's just one of the things. The interesting thing is you get young people interested in their traditional music, you get people interested in looking at solving a business challenge in a different way through using creativity and I must say a recent experience I have had was in New Zealand, and you see what is happening there as far as using creativity to drive business forward and the way artists are working with companies and the way the country is promoting itself as a visitor destination, a film location - Its exciting stuff. And I think there is a lot that we could benefit from from what other people are doing....

Robert: An anecdote from working at Highlands and Islands Enterprise: Two young bands were hoping to get assistance as business start-ups and initially, they were turned down by the relevant local enterprise company because they were a service industry...

(end of tape one)

Start of Tape two

From the floor: This is all about compartmentalised languages. Tourism, economic development, business, artpolitics. What the artist has done is brought the different languages together.this kind of rhetoric we get from the tourist bit, about exploiting what you've got. I only came back into this area 18 months ago and I have been involved with the Aberdeen and North East Family History Society for seven years and one lady was determined to come to this area. She is Californian and she is Chinese and it came to light that she is doing a project on missionaries who went to the Chinese field particularly, but she is interested in others. Now this may not interest you, but as you listen, you realise that as her focus on the whole world started to shrink to the UK and then to Scotland, she was amazed to discover that it shrank to Huntly and even shrank to Rhynie, which is where I come from, and she couldn't understand how on earth so many people in such a great concentration of missionaries could have come from such town in Scotland.

(laughter)

And, whether you are interested in religion or not, it is a phenomenon and she came here and she is going to write a book about it. But she is beating me to death with e-mails, I can tell you, to try and find a way of creating a missionary trail.

(laughter)

Euan: She's maybe the missionary in Rhynie now!

Robert: That's the perfect transition to opening it up to the whole of the floor! We've had a lot of different arguments and discussions this evening. Here's your chance to put your comments, your questions to the panel members, and give your own views on things.

From the floor: Caroline Ross: I absolutely agree with the gentleman who just spoke as well as the points that have come up. Speaking as a Scot with an English accent, due to having been brought up in Dorset and returning to my home land which is Strichen, if you like with all my ancestors, I've never come into a more friendly place or a place where I have bumped into people in the street and been so welcomed and now I am the Tai-Chi teacher in this town and I've got 22 students. The only reason we feel happy living here, my small family of artists who live with me is, we've connected to..... Sorry, if you watch Huntly on the TV, people aren't going to remember Huntly as the town with the empty shops, do you know what people remember Huntly as from what they saw the other day? - the town that has an international artist standing on a roof and talking to people in the town. This is the town, we should be pushing that has an artist that brought the town together where we've got an older lady behind me and some kids, all saying how we feel about all this place. I have just lived in London for 11 years, working in arts. How hard was it to even get our local MP down to talk about things. You - we - have got an absolute resource here. And, don't talk it down and go "oh well, it should all be about history". This is the future of Huntly. You've got artists, musicians, as far as I know and craftspeople, and business people moving in and the ice-cream trail, the missionary trail, a future art trail: Fantastic! I mean I am happy here and my accent and the way I dress hasn't caused a problem. I've been elsewhere in the world where it has, so I say thumbs up to that kind of friendliness. Why don't we sell that?

(applause)

Robert: Thank you, who's next? You must all be sitting there seething with things to say!

From the floor: Well I was going to suggest you have a whisky tin which had the shop on it....

Euan: Good idea - put some whisky in it: Whisky ice-cream, Phillip?

Phillip: It's been done and we'll do it again

Robert: Yes, Bill?

Bill: to follow on from that last comment, I mean, you've got groups of artists here, you've got the focus is on commerce as well.. How can you get the two to work together to promote the products that you've got? Ice-cream and art. What could you do with that? I am sure you could get fantastic publicity out of tying ice-cream and art together. Whisky and art...there you go, there are lots and lots of things that could potentially.....

Phillip: We put Huntly Castle on to our cartons and now we supply the whole of Historic Scotland in the whole of the country.

(applause)

- from Iona Abbey right down to Dunstaffnage, right up to the far north

Ian Hunter: I am just looking at Carol here (Professor Carol Gray) this idea of artists promoting ice-cream I think within the university arts research, money was given to an artist to work with British Airways, she actually worked to promote British Airways. She spent six months shuttling back and forward to New York on 747s so she got to know, you know, how was British Airways trying to market its products? So yes, I am thinking about artists in residence

within the ice-cream industry. You know, it's that sort of idea. It's a commercial enterprise, it's looking for new ideas. I think it's called blue-skies research?

From the floor: Are you looking for an installation, perhaps, a slider or a big cone?

From the floor: Douglas Forrest: I have a question for Eva. Eva, now that you've had your four months in Huntly and you have been brave enough to come here tonight and listen to all this discussion and questions. If you were coming back to Huntly next year, what would you do, as an artist? What would you love to do in Huntly that has been revealed to you by being here and meeting people? What would you really like to do? Artistically.

Eva: That's a good one

Douglas: You must know!

Eva: It's a good question, it's a good question but you caught me right at maybe the totally wrong moment because I'm not even finished with... Well, I finished my thing tonight, I'm still facing the finishing of the publication about the project in Huntly and local business in Huntly, so I don't know. I mean, the only thing I can think of right now, is actually to continue on the project. Probably, the most interesting thing for me in Huntly, personally, was/is to meet local people is great on a personal level and – nice people, and all that, but also I've done these interviews with a couple of the members of this panel, too, which I've never done. I mean, something that changed for me personally in Huntly is my artistic practice – totally – very different from what I've ever done before and I am quite keen to continue that and, well, my contract ends tonight, actually. And my only frustration about it, is that I guess I said that earlier, that it doesn't stop, it just doesn't stop and I think that for me personally, I grabbed something there that I would like to continue. So if you ask me right tonight, if I came back tomorrow, not next year, not next week, but tomorrow, what I would like to do, I would actually like to continue...

Robert: We'll have a collection at the door.....

(laughter)

Eva: Yes! Please...

Robert: Can I throw that back to you all? That's a very good question there. What would you like to see Deveron Arts do next? What kind of projects would you like to see happen in Huntly? Maybe that's written suggestions to Claudia....

From the floor: Alistair Robertson: Well, I'd like to see a musician in residence rather than an artist in residence. I mean, it's the same thing really. But, I mean I think taking Mr. Ellington's point, I think you know they are actually paid just to be around and play music...or say fiddlers, they wouldn't need an enormous amount, but probably they would need a few bob. I don't mean that they should be permanently in the pubs although they might well be. But I mean, that would mean that they were available just to be in the Square in the summer or whatever, and just be about and to go to people's weddings free. Of course they would be on the rates, so to speak and I think, if you have somebody who's a catalyst, who's there, I mean they're there because they're there, they are available, you then start, I mean there is a huge hoard of talent and I don't just mean the box players, I'm quite keen on the fiddlers, -but I certainly don't exclude the box players, I mean, there is a wealth of talent, but a lot of it is sort of compartmentalised. They do cross over from time to time. But that creates a nucleus of people doing things, who play together, occasionally and that sort of thing and that, I think, is a possible project for Deveron Arts. It's just a different way of going about it. I think that something that Deveron Arts could start and I think other communities might well pick up on, across Scotland. I mean, if it was a six month residency. It would probably have to be a summer residency. It has to be a commercial thing in a strange way, as well. Because, I mean, it works for the tourism and all that sort of thing. And I mean, that's important, and people can come away from Huntly saying, god, they had this amazing guy, sitting in a pub, or playing in a hotel or whatever. So there's a spin-off all round. So, that's what I would like to see from Deveron Arts.

Robert: Well, Glasgow very cannily appointed Edwin Morgan as their poet laureate for Glasgow and got a good deal of mileage out of that.

Alistair: Yes, exactly!

Robert: Any other proposals?

From the Floor: I see Deveron Arts as a tool, for, for example Aberdeenshire Council for forward planning. I think Eva's project is an example of looking into the future, with multinationals coming in and all the implications. So I think it's a tool for the community as well as the previous speaker was saying.

Robert: I think, Ian, that's maybe somewhere, where England is slightly ahead of the game – this notion that cultural planning is something that should lead other forms of planning as well.

Ian Hunter: That's a slightly contentious thing because with planning comes bureaucracy and, I mean, there is a sort of cynicism about European money around the country, because, you know, Leader Plus and all that, because what that money builds is bureaucracies in front of it. So, yes, of course, cultural planning is a... Every region has to produce it's own cultural plan which obviously looks at economic and social. But, you know, certainly, from our experience, they just create more office jobs and the money disappears and the community is still basically the same. I mean, you could argue against that. It's the local creativity, this ability to move from one area – the tai-chi

teacher from London, who's Scottish but comes from Devon – that's your multiculturalism: that's your new cultural resource. That openness, the friendliness you've got....
I'll go back to Lancashire saying that Huntly is priceless. I'll be happy to do that...

Mark: At no extra cost!

Ian Hunter: I looked at Phillip and he knew exactly what I was saying. Right?

Robert: Anne?

From the floor: Anne Douglas: I just wonder if I could open up the question about the economics and the artist. And, I mean, Eva, it is known, is sponsored by the Arts Council predominantly: is that right? I just wondered having heard her performance being both an advocate, but also opening up the tensions of the situation here, whether any of the panel would be prepared, in the next residency to actually sponsor an artist from within their own business rather than the artist being sponsored by public subsistence?

(general murmuring but no takers! laughter)

Anne Lamb: I have a question which is related to that, I think. I thought that when we were listening to the tourist discussion that we had gotten away from the idea that Eva was originally struck by the fact that we had empty shops in town. I won't say lots, in case I offend the chap from Lancashire, but I know that, I believe that Huntly people have a, think that they are a distinct group, that they know that they are Huntly people, that they have a characteristic somehow that they share... Do Huntly people think that if all the shops that are now vacant had a business in them that they would be able to support those businesses by taking their business there?
This is related to your question, because it's related to the way in which Huntly businesses may be less viable than they want. You know, I mean, some of us are not exactly coining it. Some of us are trying to stay afloat, by not paying ourselves, by not taking holidays, and it is notable that many of the shops that have been filled in the year between her original impression of a town full of empty shops and the year that she took up her residency, it's notable that some of them have been the sort of businesses that really aren't depending upon local trade. For example, I have a nodding acquaintance, or a sort of a friend, who opened up in one of the empty shops, who is actually using it more for storage of his internet, the stuff he sells on the internet. And he keeps it open because he thinks it's fun and he takes home some money. That kind of thing. It is not being sustained by the community. I want Huntly people to be able to buy everything they want in their town. But I don't know if we'll ever see that again. That is, I know, peripherally related to your question, I know it's not an answer to it. I am sorry to hijack your question in that way, and I only presume upon your good nature, which I know that you have. But it's part of the answer. It's like, yeah, yeah, yeah, I want to hang pictures in my shop, I want this and I want that, but I've got to think of the overheads.

Euan: I agree totally. We have just opened a new shop in Huntly and immediately I had a rates valuer round and I am hit for £1750 – the second I open a new shop. I mean, what kind of business can run like that? It's just impossible: you've got to be commercially viable. It's very hard. If we didn't sell overseas – 99% of our business is export – we wouldn't be here. It's impossible.

Robert: So perhaps the answer to Anne's question is only if it makes economic sense.

Euan: Yes, it's probably more commercially viable to have Eva working, doing some artistic stuff in our shop than selling whisky. Terrible admission when you've got an industry that is 200 years old – 500 years old in the end of the day and we find that it hard to do business. You know, we sell to... You are saying about tourism taking in £500 million, whisky sells in £2.5 billion in export a year. Where does the money go to from that? I don't know, probably to Guinness and people like that...
That's neither here nor there, but to be commercially viable in Huntly, I would think it would be damned hard, for anybody to be a commercially viable business in Huntly, especially when you said about Tesco's possibly moving in and Argos and all these stores, big supermarket chains in Elgin, Do-It-Yourself and all, I mean it is so incredibly hard to make money.

From the floor: Claudia Zeiske: Is that a Huntly problem or is that everywhere?

Euan: It's universal. If you look at things that are happening in the States now...
Supermarket chains in the states are going back to creating little niche businesses within their supermarkets, they are franchising. So there is a reversal and let's hope that the reversal goes a stage further in the UK. But its down the Community Councillors, its down to Councillors, it's down to everybody that can stimulate that.

Mark Ellington: There is also a very interesting problem when it comes to the retail sector and that is, if farming or fishing or certain forms of manufacturing get in trouble, there are sectors that speak up for them, or who work for them, unions speak up for them. There is actually outside of the federated small business and chambers of commerce, there are very few people, speaking for the retail sector and certainly no one speaking for the small shopkeeper and it is very, very important, I mean it is an important and critical resource to a town, because otherwise, people just won't come to the town. Like Ellon, you know, people come to Ellon and live there but they go off elsewhere to work and even to go out for an evening. I mean Ellon has something like seven hairdressers and fourteen fast food takeaway places, but it hasn't got a butchers shop and it hasn't got a baker's shop. You know, it just becomes a dormitory town and, I mean is that a real community? And the shops are critical to that but there is no-one speaking out for the shops and it is incredible, it's a critical issue and I don't know what the answer is. It's a challenge.

Euan: Another thing, we look at Scottish Enterprise and Bill will probably answer this.... One of the things you said was: don't use a need based argument to attract investment. Granted that is 100% right, because if you are in need you are on the slippery slope, it should be the other way, and that is quite right, but could Scottish Enterprise not look at the sort of micro-global thing within a town, take a number of businesses and stimulate the growth within a town. Go and see each business. Instead of inward investment, pulling companies in from abroad, why does Scottish Enterprise not come to a place like Huntly or Fraserburgh and say, right, what can we do for this community? We've got £50,000: what can we do? Take a closer look at how the community is run, and maybe appoint a – maybe not an artist - some sort of management figure that can stimulate the economy within that town.

Bill: Across Scotland, there's all sorts of devices like that. Often you will see in towns like Stirling, for example, they actually have a town centre management. You know people who actually are charged with driving forward, promoting, coordinating, making sure that the basics are right. And that's a town centre management. It actually works quite well. There are plenty of precedents across Scotland where that is actually supported by organisations like Scottish Enterprise. Bear in mind, unlike Highlands and Islands, Scottish Enterprise is an economic development agency. We have to account for the money we invest in that regard. I think this gentleman is quite right in saying that, to an audience like this that must sound a bit like a kind of stereotyped answer. This is a public sector answer. But there is a creativity within, what will you do to try and find different ways to make things happen. One of the areas..... in fact, two of the areas I am responsible for are Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders, the Scottish Borders. There are quite a lot of similarities.

One of the big problems you have, mostly with the Borders communities is the gradual decline in the population. The population is aging, it is going down: It is trying to get young people to stay in the community. One of the things that we have been trying to do is to try and bring... If you can't bring businesses physically into a town which supports employment, what you can maybe do is look at the businesses that are there that might actually grow from within the community. You can allow them to access much bigger markets if you invest in say, the broadband technology so they can actually trade on-line. You know, you are talking here about the concern about the shops in Huntly. I was quite impressed actually just on my quick walk around at how many speciality shops there are. I fully accept Anne's point that they must be quite fragile. But if you look at some of the retail patterns that we have in Scotland. Even in my own family, my wife does most of her shopping without leaving the house and it's all done, you know, Tesco on line and it's delivered. That sort of technology and what that can open up in terms of any kind of business enterprise in point of fact, you've got to take very seriously and try and exploit it.

Euan: But then, you'll never leave your house! What's the point of that?

Bill: No, No what actually happens is that you tend to have the opportunity to value other things within the cultural field that are much more important and do something about it. The point I was trying make earlier about the community, of which this is a very representative and motivated cross section, is that there is a population of 4000 in Huntly. They are not all here. What you need to do, is you need to have as many people as possible within the community talking the community up, talking the area up in terms of its opportunity. There are many, many areas in Scotland that say, I want to be placed at the top of the needs agenda, my problems are greater than the problems of North Lanarkshire. An organisation like Scottish Enterprise has got £450 million to try and invest for economic benefit. It is extremely hard to make judgements about where these priorities lie, but I will tell you one thing. It is much easier to put money behind the prospect of money growing, creating jobs and developing the economy than to put it somewhere where it is basically about maintaining a situation and addressing need. So it is very good that Huntly, on the basis of the publicity, and don't be too precious about how that publicity is generated. I actually don't believe there is such a thing as bad publicity. You do create awareness, but you have to build on that. You know, sell the assets of the area, profess its virtues. I made that contrast when I first came here. The impression I got from the coverage, and accepting that wasn't the intended message, you know I am the audience; I came here expecting to see, you know, a dispirited community, lots of physical evidence of decline. Huntly hasn't got that. So, you know, you need to take every opportunity, through the arts, through the media, through what you do yourself, how you advocate the value of your community to have more people understand it's worth and therefore be more interested in visiting it, more interested potentially in doing business here, or doing business with the businesses that are already here.

Mark: One of the important things is the fact that Huntly is doing relatively well to build on the strengths. Wow! We are doing well because I think there is a cold wind going to be blowing very soon and, you know not all publicity is good publicity and we've got a unique situation in the North-East and I think we have to look at the bigger North-East picture and in the case of Fraserburgh, we have a town that probably has perhaps the worst image and identity of any town, certainly in Scotland, if not in the United Kingdom and the publicity, the story the press keeps selling over and over and over again reinforce that, and something has to be done, you know. We've got something in the emergency ward with Fraserburgh but most of our towns, are also, whether we like to admit it or not, facing some real challenges. The interesting thing is, we do, in Aberdeenshire have an agency that can assist, or can help and that is the Town Partnership which covers five Aberdeenshire towns at the moment, but not yet Huntly and that can access money from Scottish Enterprise and from European sources and that can actually put in place a town manager that can start building on the strengths. But it's a very complex problem and it ain't going to get any easier.

Robert: Are there any other points from the floor? Yes?

Audience: My wife and I bought a closed shop 18 months ago in Rhynie and hopefully in a month or two, we will open a tea room and gift shop. But the mountain we've had to climb! If we'd know before we would probably have stayed in Aberdeen. And we haven't found the Enterprise people particularly helpful. There is a lot of good information, but dialogue like this is needed much, much more, because to give you one example, our planning application went through, a year ago, on the 9th of April. But on the first of April, the CO2 emissions legislation came into place, which is about the heat going through the roof. And huge increases have happened for insulating buildings, not just the roof, walls, floors and new double glazing. Now anybody who is in business here, or has an

established business does not need to worry about that. They carry on with their flimsy insulation. But the people who are renovating the closed shop, which inevitably, because it has been in decline for many years isn't usually a building in good condition, then we fall straight into that hole. Now, the departments will quickly jump in and say, ah, but there's grants for that, which is right, but when you get to clause 97 you see that it says that you have to be in business x-number of years..... So you see, it's that kind of thing that we need to encapsulate and say, if we are serious about Huntly and its area and its economy, we need some type of flexibility to be built in. Thank you.

Robert: Anybody that we have not heard from yet that would like to say anything?

From the floor: Sandy Mitchell: Well, can I first of all, on behalf of everyone thank Eva for her project. I think its a marvellous project that you have done. I don't take the interpretation that the panel have put forward of a negative image in this portrayal. I see it more as a sunset on empty shops in the town. I would like to look at it that way. The question you asked, Mr. Chairman, which I don't think was quite picked up on here, is what do we want Deveron Arts really to do, or what would Deveron arts like to do, and I think it is coming out of the discussion, Deveron Arts could actually be a sort of coordinator, more for artistic groups in the area than it has had that privilege up to now. Huntly has a wealth of fiddlers and raconteurs and singers and dancers – hosts of people. I often wonder why there isn't somebody running ceilidhs and things for tourists over the summer as a sort of focus point for folk nights and things like that. There is a huge wealth of folk activity and other art that could take place and I think Deveron Arts may be uniquely placed to coordinate that. Thank you.

(applause)

Robert: That seems like an excellent, positive note on which to draw the proceedings to a close. I would like to thank Eva in particular, for her project and all our panellists this evening for taking part and all of you for coming along and also taking part. Thank you very much.

Jim Brook: On behalf of Deveron Arts, thank you very much to the panel for their wisdom and generosity of ideas. Thank you very much to the audience as well along the same lines. There's probably going to be some drinks in the bar if people really want to get to the nitty-gritty of one to one conversation. I am sure everyone will still have the energy to continue. There is also going to be a dinner for anyone who wants to carry on the evening at the Bakers Oven in Bogie St. after drinks in the bar. So if anyone would like to join in with that meal, they are more than welcome.
Raye?

Raye Marcus: Maybe it's a good time to give a wee plug for our next discussion evening, which will be on the first of November. Some of you with small children may have been involved in the Halloween celebration, which we plan to repeat this year. And since that is around the time when the Turner Prize is being discussed normally in the media, which usually generates some interesting conversation and as we will be very much concerned with neep lanterns the night before, we are organising our panel discussion with the theme, Turnip to Turner. What is art and how does it impact on our lives? So, that is going to be on the first of November and in all probability, if we can quieten things down a bit at the back, it will be here. Maybe we need to get a doorkeeper to keep the door shut! There's been of difficulty at the back with hearing....

Robert: Eva has asked us to wait, she's off to do something, I'm not sure what it is, so don't go away just yet. Chat amongst yourselves!

(loud buzz of animated conversation)

Eva: (to panel members) Thank you very much for coming. This is something from my hometown. It is a Danish smoked Greenland fish. It's from my brothers. Enjoy it!