

Chrysalis Arts: GAP Guide Case Study : Collaboration with other Disciplines
Interview with Professor Les Firbank

i) What is your professional area of expertise?

I am an ecologist, specializing in the relationships between farming, land and nature. I am also an expert in the environmental risk assessment of genetically modified organisms.

ii) How do you think the arts can increase awareness of the climate emergency and Sixth Extinction, or encourage behavioural change?

To get the message across, increase awareness and encourage dialogue. The arts cannot do this by themselves, but can reach people that other approaches do not. To me, personal engagement with our environment is absolutely necessary if we are to meet these challenges – the arts provide an important way of fostering this.

iii) What do you see as the most important aspects of artists' engagement with the climate emergency?

They all work with some people. They are all needed.

iv) If you have worked with artists before, please tell us about this experience and any ways in which you think this was of benefit.

I was involved in the Arts Transpennine programme back in the 1990s. Two impacts struck me at the time; it led to the creation of groups of people across disciplines and employers to consider common issues in an atmosphere of trust and openness – it was an arts project, so we could set aside our professional barriers. The second was how individuals interacted with the exhibition I was involved with – often picking out tiny details that increased their understanding of their very local environment,

v) How did this collaboration come about?

A curious phone call from the arts group (including David Haley) requesting information

vi) Were there any aspects of the collaboration that you would do differently in the future? If so, please explain.

Probably all of it – I have more experience, my focus has shifted. But it was right at the time.

vii) Do you think that any aspects of your current work could be enhanced through collaborating with an artist and is there a particular artform that might be appropriate?

Certainly