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Artists announced for Explore Essex Arts Commission to celebrate National Tree Week

ESSEX County Council's (ECC) Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Green Spaces Service is delighted to announce that the arts partnership, INSTAR, have been awarded the *Explore Essex Arts Commission*.

Created to raise public awareness about the environment, the *Explore Essex Arts Commission* will also examine people's connection with the natural world through contemporary art.

INSTAR - a partnership featuring artists Trish Evans and Nick Humphreys - have previously worked with The Wildlife Trust, The National Forests and The National Trust. Their winning concept, 'Infinity Forest', is an immersive experience using mirrored and steel surfaces in the landscape.

The commissioning panel were impressed by INSTAR's extensive experience working with national organisations, their enthusiasm for engaging with local communities and their innovative proposal.

The 'ECHO' artwork - which will be launched in spring 2021 at one of the eight Explore Essex Country Parks at the close of the tree planting season - will form part of the landscape, explore the themes of our natural environment, engage with the members of the public and provide a positive legacy.

The artist commission is also part of the wider *Essex Forest Initiative*, which is ECC's commitment to planting 375,000 trees, covering approximately 150 hectares, throughout the county's parks and green spaces over the next five years to capture 60,000 tonnes of carbon.

The *Essex Forest Initiative* - which launched in October 2019 - will continue this November, with the first year's target of 25,000 trees being planted this winter. The award of the commission coincides with *National Tree Week*, the UK's largest annual tree celebration which takes place from Saturday 28 November until Sunday 6 December 2020, and which marks the start of tree planting season.

ECC will work with the Woodland Trust, the Evergreen Trust and the Forestry Commission - along with the city, borough and district councils - to reduce carbon levels, improve air quality, encourage biodiversity and reduce flooding.

Councillor Simon Walsh, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Action, said: "We are delighted to award the commission to INSTAR as we were looking for artists who have extensive experience of producing and positioning artworks in the public realm.

"Not only will INSTAR help to promote the *Essex Forest Initiative* and the importance of creating and supporting green infrastructure, it is also another way we can help support the arts and cultural sector during this turbulent time."

INSTAR commented: "Taking action for nature and the environment is one of the most important issues of our times and the plans of the *Essex Forest Initiative* to plant 375,000 trees in the next five years is a mission we find greatly inspiring.

“The trees planted, the habitats they will create, and the vast amount of species they will support, offer significant value to the health and wellbeing of local people, visitors and the environment alike.”

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Explore Essex: Explore Essex brings together a unique group of Country Parks and heritage venues which are owned by Essex County Council. Its mission is to deliver a broad range of exciting facilities and events for the people of Essex with an emphasis on culture, heritage and environment. www.explore-essex.com

Essex Forest Initiative: The first tree planting took place in October 2019 at Great Notley Country Park and will continue in the autumn and winter of 2020 in the new tree planting season. Essex County Council is committed to planting £1million worth of trees over the next five years. This will include planting 375,000 trees, over 150 hectares, equivalent to the size of 210 football pitches. This commitment is part of Essex County Council’s Climate Change Action Plan and the initiative is part of wider efforts ECC is under-taking to tackle climate change, reduce carbon, promote environmentally friendly infrastructure and protect green spaces. For more information please visit the [ECC website](#) and dedicated [Facebook page](#).