

Bridport to Maiden Newton Cycle Route

Project summary

A partnership of Sustrans and The Dorset Wildlife Trust, lead by artist and curator Anna Best (see Appendix 2 for CV), is applying to the **wide open space** scheme to research the feasibility of a programme of commissions which will enhance and contribute to the development and implementation of a new trail way in Dorset. This project addresses two of the key themes of Wide Open space – “collaborative design processes in protected landscapes” and “sustainability and design quality in public spaces” and is also potentially relevant to “combining innovative design with traditional materials”.

The route will use a shared use path along the route of the former Maiden Newton-Bridport railway which would help fill an existing need for sustainable modes of transport, providing a traffic-free route for commuters and school children, in an area with limited public transport. It would encourage sustainable tourism, with public transport links at both ends, as well as linking two major routes in the National Cycle Network. Local businesses – pubs, cafes, B&B, cycle hire/repair – would all benefit, and new start-ups would be encouraged. The creation of the path fits with National, Regional and Local transport policy to encourage walking and cycling, specifically with the transport strategy for the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, policy C2, to „provide new multi-use paths,“ and „investigate redundant transport corridors.“ (see Appendix 1 for more information on benefits and policy context). The line is largely intact, much of it already used informally by walkers, and no major works would be needed to make it suitable for shared use. The railway is unusual in that it is almost entirely intact and hasn't been built on. Lots of details from the railway era - fence posts, gates, railwaymen's huts-remain. This railway heritage, along with the ecology of the area will be the main subjects of the arts project.

A proposed route has been drawn up, and negotiations are ongoing with the landowners. Dorset Wildlife Trust has already agreed to allow the path to run along its section of line. Initial finance is already in place. The remainder will be sought from private and public sources. Construction of the path will be on a section by section basis, linking communities, as agreements are reached with landowners. This process is expected to take 3-4 years.

The art project's aims are to help the trailway as it is implemented over the next 3-4 years by programming temporary art events and developing the commissioning of permanent works which will:

- raise awareness amongst the public of the site's particular heritage and ecology, sustainable transport and people powered transportation,
- explore the meaning of “commons” in the 21st century
- support wider physical and intellectual (interpretative) access to the landscape
- creating an ongoing public resource for educational use by local community organisations and schools.

The vision will be created through a collaborative process of working with the stakeholders; the steering committee for the path consisting of a local benefactor and Sustrans representatives, landowners including the Dorset Wildlife Trust, and with the 300 local supporters already committed. The participatory approach which underpins the artworks will engage public and path users in discussion and involvement in the place, developing a sense of ownership and facilitating the implementation of the path.

Funding from Wide Open Space will therefore be used to research and develop an “arts strategy”, or curatorial vision, that considers permanent artworks, designed structures and active educational resources to be implemented over the 3 year period of construction. This will form the basis of further funding applications to organisations such as the Arts Council and will be further supported by Sustrans and the steering group for the Trailway (with mentoring advice from Mark Segal at ArtSway).

Originality and innovation of the project idea

Sustrans supports this work as it will create a new model for the integration of the arts in cycle path schemes that is a new type of participatory interpretation as opposed to the majority of their work which functions primarily as forms of signage, waymarking or furniture. Through this project and collaborations grand themes of transport, alternative energy and health are explored in a highly local way and manifested at a time when we are searching for ways to address peak oil and climate chaos.

The decommissioned railway line is a relic of 1970's petrol fuelled transport policy and its transformation suggests a symbolic road for the future.

In artistic terms the process of working with others, weaving agendas, bringing surreality into the everyday is a central part of the art itself. The artwork is a project not an object, about experiences and relationships rather than sculptural icon. It will challenge perceptions about what art in nature can be, and inevitably raise discussion about our slowly changing views towards nature. It is socially engaged and experimental.

Potential for sustainability

The trailway will provide commuters, school-goers, families and tourists with a 16 mile safe, flat cycleway, the only one in the area. By making links between the coast and an inland rail station it is also expected to enrich the sustainable tourism in the area. Its existence will benefit the health and wellbeing of individual people as well as contributing to a lower carbon footprint by literally decreasing vehicle emissions as well as challenging attitudes. The art project will contribute to this by raising awareness and directly engaging people in a creative dialogue on these issues.

Opportunities for learning and education

The following is an initial outline of education and learning opportunities in the long term – these ideas will be finalised through the research and development period.

Initially Anna Best would work on Powerstock Common with the Architecture Association at Hooke Park, staff and students to design and build a redevelopment of the existing hut incorporating accommodation for lesser horseshoe bats and teenagers. These users have been identified with the landowners Dorset Wildlife Trust. Pilot Publishing could be commissioned to bring their Energy Café (www.energycafe.wordpress.com) to the site and local schools. They would run workshops around

commons, edible food and pedal power. Their café is housed in an adapted horse box and will make a symbolic horse drawn journey along the trailway. Other project partners to be approached would be Treewise (<http://www.treewise.org.uk/>) and PVA labculture (the digital arts organisation in Bridport) to work with children, families and young people on site with the issues addressed above, with natural materials and digital video respectively.

Participation by communities

As part the research and development process Anna Best will discuss these plans and agree detailed proposals and budgets with all contributors and partners. The community groups who will be consulted are:

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- railway supporters re collective involvement
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- transition town bridport and local slow food groups and collectives
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- local cycling groups and lobbyists

Collaboration between artists and design teams

The project will ensure that artists commissioned as part of this process work closely with staff at Sustrans in implementing any work. The involvement of the Architectural Association will foster cross-disciplinary working between artists and architects in this project.

Initial ideas which have been discussed with the Dorset Wildlife Trust which owns parts of the site are for project that utilises a series of 6 derelict rail workers huts. The research period will set out the basis for a commission for artist/architect teams to redevelop the first of 6 huts along the route, at Powerstock Common where each hut could be developed as permanent feature and public resource (potentially managed by local organisations, locked up but accessible by arrangement). For example these huts could be used as a community kitchens, a hut as a reading room or library, a hut as a playhouse/theatre for children, a hut as a refuge (self serve hotel).

Replicability and potential for leaving a legacy and potential as best practice

This project represents a unique, ground up approach to the development of community involvement in creating a new trailway. Its potential legacy is for the users of the site, and for the local creative community will be their involvement and education about the scope for using art to develop this type of project, encouraging usage of the trail and raising awareness of the relationship of local communities (particularly young people) to the ecology and heritage of the site.

Creating new partnerships or strengthening existing ones

The initial research and development process will float initial ideas with potential partners then agree detailed proposals and budgets with the groups as set out above, i.e:

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- railway supporters re collective involvement
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- the Architectural Association
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- Dorset Wildlife Trust
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- Transition Town Bridport and local slow food groups
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- Treewise
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- PVA labculture
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- local cycling groups and lobbyists

Events will be held as part of the R&D process which will introduce initial ideas (on site near Toller Porcorum and Powerstock Common). This will include an educational workshop and demonstrations with Treewise (www.treewise.org.uk) - scionwood swap and grafting on site, bike flag making and a group called Magnificent Revolution (<http://www.magnificentrevolution.org>) with their pedal powered generator. A further event will invite the Feral Choir with Phil Minton and local vocalists(www.philmintonsferalchoir.com). As well as the public involvement these events will serve as a focus to invite Architectural Association students and staff based at Hooke Park, and develop links with DWT Common wardens and Kingcombe Centre, PVA labculture, Bridport Arts Centre and local authority arts officers to become involved in the trailway development process.

In addition to compiling outline briefs for these proposed commissions, based on consultation and workshops, the research will identify:

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- An inter/national "lead artist" to collaborate with Anna Best
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- Further funding sources
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- Permissions needed
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- A budget and timescale for the next stages

This r&d phase of work will commence in February 2010 and be completed May 2010

The budget for this research and development phase is:

1. artist curator time and expenses 10 days @ £250 £2500
2. advertising and appointing inter/national artist incl. r&d proposal fee £1000
3. contributors Magnificent Revolution and Treewise expenses £500
4. event early 2010 (feral choir) £1000

Total expenditure - £5000