

Heathland Art Project Proposal Draft 2

The Project

The aim of this project is to celebrate and profile Britain's heathlands and promote the significance of heathlands to the general public through artistic interpretation.

Heathlands have a strong association with people, having been first formed through human's intervention and then sustained over the last two thousand years through management. This, together with the obvious appeal of heathlands for their diversity of wildlife and landscape beauty so broadens their appeal to a wider cross-section of society and makes them an ideal candidate for an art project.

Through painting, sculpture and photography, heathlands will be revealed through the eyes of the artists. This will provide a unique insight into the complex issues surrounding heathlands from a perspective different to that of a heathland ecologist: and perhaps one better understood by the general public (for whom Action Plan targets and condition assessments are largely meaningless).

Using such a visual medium as art will reveal a different but equally fundamental understanding of the importance of heathlands. It will also increase awareness of the issues involved in its maintenance, and the historical and cultural heritage that is so important in understanding and appreciating this unique landscape.

Previously FC has been involved in two extremely successful art projects. One, "Aig an Oir" based in the Scottish Atlantic oak-woods and another "A Sense of Place" based in the New Forest, both culminated in the production of a book of the works produced as well as an exhibition.

However this project is a little different in that it is the first to concentrate on a single habitat, a habitat that has very wide UK distribution and yet that shows so much variation from one place to another. If enough funding could be sought it is aimed that this project would run throughout 2007 culminating in an exhibition in 2008. The timing would coincide with the publication of the new Heathland Habitat Action Plan, 10 years after the first one was published.

Aims and Objectives

The project's ultimate aim is to:-

- Put heathlands on the map
- Draw attention to the value of this vulnerable habitat
- Demonstrate innovative ways to deliver local economic benefits
- Demonstrate the appropriateness of heaths for environmental education

The project will provide short group residencies for artists from groups such as Artists for Nature Foundation (ANF) and the Society for Wildlife Artists (SWLA) as well as for student artists from colleges throughout Great Britain. The aim would be to use as many local artists as possible. However the new insights gained from artists unfamiliar to a particular area would also be useful. By gathering small groups of artists together and

allowing each group to work for a while in different areas at different times of the year an interpretative and descriptive portrait of heathlands would be produced.

The artwork would be exhibited locally. This would increase local community interest and involvement in the heaths. This might be volunteering to clear scrub, or through controlling dogs where heathland birds are breeding, and actively supporting site conservation when threatened by development or neglect.

A feeling of respect would be fostered for these important habitats by portraying heathlands as places of beauty. This is especially important in heaths on the fringes of urban areas where the remaining heaths are at risk from development. It is also important in more rural areas where lack of management is leading to the deterioration of the heaths. By explaining the issues the public would understand why heathland management is actually beneficial in terms of heathland conservation.

The resulting artwork will be exhibited in local galleries in each area and linked to a programme of open days, workshops and master-classes with groups of local people. A national exhibition and a book will also be produced bringing together work from the different areas.

Administration and Finances

This proposal has support from the ANF, SWLA, FC England and from other members of the heathland HAP steering group. If the project is to be UK-wide then it will need to be promoted further to FC Scotland and Wales as well as other interested organisations. A steering group comprising representatives from all funding partners as well as ANF/SWLA will direct the project.

Estimated costs, based on the cost of the Atlantic Oak-woods project are around £150,000. The New Forest project cost approximately £60,000, a lower sum than the “Aig an Oir” project due to less community involvement and a more compact area over which the project was administered.

The cost of a heathland project would depend to a large extent on the geographical spread of the project sites. Ideally areas of lowland heath within each of the four countries involved in the lowland heathland HAP would be chosen. This may be limited by the amount of money available.

FC England will provide an initial contribution of approximately £10,000 towards the project. Other project partners may include FC Wales and FC Scotland, NI Forest Service, CCW, EN, SNH, MOD, National Trust, RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts, Butterfly Conservation and Plantlife.

It would also be beneficial to contact industries within the art world such as Jessops or Daler Rowney, Canon and Windsor Newton. If the project was going to involve ANF, a Dutch charity at the forefront of landscape-scale heathland conservation, then other Dutch conservation organisations could also be approached for funding.

Rebecca Wilson, May 2006