

Artist taps into the past for fountain revival bid

Steve Teale
NEWS CORRESPONDENT

MONEY might be tight, but for the people of Ilkley there is great value on art and civic pride.

Local authorities are rarely able to invest in public sculpture these days but that did not deter the people of the famous spa town: they launched a fundraising campaign themselves.

And last year a public competition was launched by charity Improving Ilkley to find a design for a fountain which they plan to restore in the centre of the town.

The original one of 1865 was also chosen by public competition, and like the original, the restored one will be gravity-fed with the water running off Ilkley Moor into the fountain and on towards the River Wharfe. To date, they have collected almost £60,000 to make their idea a reality by October.

Artist Juliet Gutch, whose idea was chosen, said: "I remember hearing about this competition at a local arts evening.

"The plan to go back in time to the gravity-fed fountain, using water from the much-loved Ilkley Moor on its journey through the town, immediately inspired an idea. I felt straightaway that the starting point for the design should respond to sphagnum moss, which is vital to our town's historical relationship with water."

This plant, which can hold up to 20 times its own weight in liquid, is famous for its natural healing properties. It cleans and filters the moorland water, and is a key rea-

son why Ilkley became a spa town where people flocked to "take the waters".

Nowadays it is well known as being crucial for storing carbon, flood prevention and biodiversity: a hectare of peat bog, 30cm deep, captures as much carbon as the same area of the Amazon Rain Forest.

Gradually the idea evolved. Juliet says: "The design became about providing a backdrop for pure moorland water, cleaned by the moss, at a time when the pollution of our rivers becomes ever more evident."

Louise Hepworth-Wood, Project Manager and Improving Ilkley Trustee said "The proposed contemporary fountain design was voted most popular from 17 entries, whittled down to a shortlist of three."

The funding has not been an easy journey, but the arrival of the 1:5 scale model and the subsequent art exhibition and auction, set up by Improving Ilkley to raise money and involving 30 donated works by local artists, was a turning point. Louise said it was "quite a remarkable community project".

She said: "The exhibition included works which, like the fountain design, also responded to moorland, and the full amount from each successful bid went to the project. The support from the artists felt very significant and has been the prompt for the crowdfunding to take off. To see the comments and support on the JustGiving page is wonderful and we feel the town is really behind this unique project." **Comment: Page 12.**



DAVID LINDSAY/JOAN RANSLEY



WATER LINK: Main and right, artist and sculptor Juliet Gutch in her studio and at Ilkley Moor. Left, the model of the new design for the fountain. Her starting point for the design is that it should respond to sphagnum moss, which is vital to Ilkley's historical relationship with water.