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New walking trail for Pulborough to boost tourism and local economy

Pulborough is getting an investment of almost £200,000 from the European Union's Agriculture Fund for Rural Development Programme (EAFRD) to support rural tourism. The funding comes via the government's Rural Payments Agency through a grant application fronted by Horsham District Council's Economic Development team.

The funds will be used to create a four kilometre (approximately 2.5 miles) walk starting from Pulborough Station, along the Cinder Path, Church Place, Old Rectory Lane, East Glebe Field, Lower Street, Barn House Lane, across the Wildbrooks and to the RSPB Pulborough Brooks nature reserve. The trail will be designed to be walked from either end or in sections.

The walk, initially called the WildArt Trail, will be marked throughout by high quality sculptures, way markers and information boards highlighting the local history and wildlife along the way. This will be supported by an electronic app which will be developed for walkers to find out more information about the walk, countryside, wildlife and local history and points of interest. The app will also be an educational tool for younger audiences and will include a bespoke treasure trail.

The project will be managed by a Steering Group with partners from: Horsham District Council, RSPB, Pulborough Community Partnership, Pulborough Parish Council and the South Downs National Park.

The children's component will be supported by entertaining Augmented Reality (AR). Along the trail, children will meet and interact with 3D augmented characters, encouraging them to engage with wildlife and nature. The inclusion of AR within the app will be a unique feature point, which will maximise the potential to attract more visitors to use the trail and visit Pulborough.

The concept for the trail was started by Pulborough Community Partnership director Rob Aylott working with chairman Roger Paterson and David Hurst, with the intention of increasing footfall in the Lower Street retail area. The idea expanded with inspiration from tourist development work done elsewhere in the country and enthusiasm from others as they heard of the idea.

Rob Aylott said "Pulborough is right in the heart of rural West Sussex and on the centre of the north boundary of the South Downs National Park. We have a rail station and two A roads so it seems a natural idea to develop a tourism element to the local economy. The simple idea of having a quiz for visiting children expanded to the concept that we now have planned.

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"Pulborough has more than 40 listed buildings and a history going back to the Romans and earlier," he continued. "The Wildbrooks and the River Arun are vital to the well-being of the residents and a major reason for living here."

David Hurst added "The RSPB Pulborough Brooks reserve is the largest tourism destination in the District and one of the most biodiverse areas in the country. It is a no-brainer to connect the village to the Reserve using the wonderful footpaths across the Wildbrooks. Add to that the rail and bus access to the village and the whole trail becomes possible."

Ray Qusted, Chairman of Pulborough Parish Council, commented: "The trail is something completely different for Pulborough and will give the village and surrounding areas a real boost, bringing more visitors to the area, especially families, and encouraging them to stay for longer and as a result spend more money when they are here.

"It provides an excellent opportunity for our tourism economy businesses – food and drink, accommodation and visitor attraction providers which in turn will help the whole village economy."

It is proposed to have the trail up and running by Summer 2019 to coincide with Horsham District's Year of Culture.

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