



FLAX FORWARD

The story of a plant, a town and a landscape

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From land to linen and beyond - Telling the story of a plant, a town and a landscape.

A community-led project celebrating Bridport's flax-growing heritage and exploring the potential for a sustainable future.

The project will gather and connect knowledge from collections, archives, and community sources, uncovering unrecorded infrastructure, information, memories, and oral histories. By mapping local flax cultivation and processing, the project will connect people, place, and heritage, and use this shared knowledge to explore new opportunities for re-establishing flax as a sustainable material.

Connecting Heritage and Place

For over 1,000 years, the Bridport area has had a strong cultural and economic link with flax and hemp, both plants grown and processed locally into rope, nets, and sailcloth.

While the hemp growing and ropemaking are well documented and form much of the display in Bridport Museum, the history of flax is less well known. Once a defining part of the local landscape and economy, flax shaped the town's identity through generations of cultivation, processing, and making.

Much of the remaining industry's infrastructure is in danger of disappearing, and memories of those who worked with flax risk being lost. What does Bridport Museum hold in its unseen archives? What lost machinery lies forgotten in old outbuildings and stores, what local knowledge, stories, and memories are there to be captured?

The project will explore how the region's geology and soils shaped flax production, uncover stories behind local buildings and place

names, and draw on archives and collections from Bridport and nearby museums. It will investigate where flax was grown, who was involved, what remains in the landscape, and the legacy of local crafts, while recording oral histories to preserve memories of the flax industry before they are lost.

Through this research, we'll bring Bridport's heritage to life, connecting past and present and deepening our understanding of place and community.

Community Connections and Sharing the Knowledge

Community led Research

Local residents will be invited to explore the history of flax growing in the Bridport area. Supported by a heritage research facilitator they will collect oral histories, investigate museum collections, and examine the local landscape for evidence of flax cultivation and processing.

Growing and Processing

A hands-on flax-growing and processing programme will give people the chance to learn practical skills while linking traditional methods with modern practice. Community activities throughout the growing season will spark conversations and gather new stories that enrich the local museum research.

Community Conversations

Regular meet-ups, discussions, and creative gatherings will bring together researchers, farmers, geologists, scientists, artists, and writers. These exchanges will inspire collaboration and link Bridport with other flax-related projects across the country. The project will also explore science, technology, and sustainability, connecting heritage with ideas for sustainable futures.

Making

The community creation of a linen dress made from locally produced and spun flax will engage participants in every stage of the flax story and connecting historical traditions with present-day practice.

Telling the Story

Creative specialists including a photographer, filmmaker, writer, map maker, artists and makers will follow the project through the flax-growing and processing cycle documenting, interpreting and reimagining its heritage in creative ways and inspiring innovative future applications for flax.

Sharing the Knowledge

Exhibitions will share the research, documentation and creative responses celebrating Bridport's flax story and sharing it with wider audiences. By combining oral histories, archival research, and creative interpretation, the project will strengthen connections between people and place showing how local heritage can inspire the present.

Mapping

A key legacy from the research will be a flax map of the Bridport area bringing together oral histories and archival research into one document that tells the flax story.

Archiving

A library of oral history recordings and research documentation will be archived at Bridport Museum. Displays will be updated to reflect the significance of flax growing and production for the town.

Partnership and Collaboration

Flax Forward is a partnership project funded by the Heritage Lottery and Trellis Foundation.

- **Wessex Community Assets** leads on hands-on growing and processing activities and overall project management.

- **Bridport Museum** leads on heritage research and interpretation.
- **Bridport Arts Centre** leads on exhibition curation and creative commissions.

Timeline

The community research will begin in spring 2026 and follow the flax sowing, growing, harvesting and processing season through to the manufacture of products using local yarn. Events and activities throughout 2026 will connect the research with practical activity culminating in a multi venue exhibition to share the community research and innovative learning in early 2027.

Flax Forward Project timeline May 2026 – June 2027

Practical sessions growing and processing flax: May – October 2026

Research and mapping flax production in the locality: June - Oct 2026

Exhibition at Bridport Arts Centre and Bridport Museum - sharing the research: Oct 2026

Production of map, film and exhibition materials: Oct 2026 – May 2027

Exhibition at Bridport Arts Centre and Bridport Museum - sharing final research and creative interpretations. May 2027 .