proposal for **"tread softly"** LAndED, Beerse, April - May 2014

I would like to work with Site No. 3 on the plan - the wooden causeway going over an area which is wetland for some of the year.

I have been looking at the way spiders - the kinds known as "sheet weavers" - make nets close to the ground, which are like little tents, in which the spider lives, hanging upside-down.
Often large areas are covered by spider nets in this way:

Spider webs are a phenomenon of nature, and still a mystery to science. Their silk is four times as strong as steel, and can stretch to three times their length...

Technology is trying to make use of the properties of spider webs, for medicine and for industry. So far, no-one has the exact formula for the secret of the spider's silk.

In the 19th Century, attempts were made to create luxurious fabrics from spider silk.

Nowadays, they want to make bullet-proof vests from it: a sign of our times?

Or it could be used to re-connect nerve fibres, sew up wounds, and even in gene technology. Spider silk is antimicrobial, hypoallergenic and completely biodegradable.

The domed-tent type of spider web was used as the inspiration for architecture, eg. the tent-like structures built for the Olympics in Munich in the 70's.

Working on both sides of the wooden causeway, I want to cover the area beside the path with my own "spider nets", made from biodegradable unbleached cotton netting and string, and fixed into the ground using sharpened wooden stakes of different lengths.

The nets and strings are joined and stretched, to make structures of varying density and height.

The "nets" will cover some of the wet area, hovering just above the surface of the water, and some of the drier areas with plants.

I imagine that the area covered by the nets will be at least 12m x 8m on each side of the path - larger, if materials and time will allow.

The netting is transparent, is almost not-there, lets light and small creatures through, and will gleam and shimmer in the sunlight, especially when it is wet.



The spider net is a cultural icon for creativity and manufacturing in the natural world. The spider produces its architectural webs from its own body: from within its "Self", without other aid or material.

It is also associated with specifically female industries - spinning, weaving - which need much patience and persistence, and which have been essential for essential comfort and for the development of human culture from the earliest times.

In much of my work which used gauze and transparent netting, I find that the spaces and objects created with this kind of material leave the viewers' thoughts free to enter and leave the work, and help to stimulate the imagination to find interpretations of one's own.



A net is made to catch something.

In this case, along your way through the landscape, it catches only the sunlight, and the imagination.

There is a strong undertone of danger in the idea of a spider net, along with its beauty, and it should sensitise the visitors to the many qualities of nature, not all of which are comfortable for modern, city-dwelling people to think about.

It is often useful to pay attention to all the small drama taking place beside our feet...



The association of netting and water is obvious: here, the human being is the predator that is trying to catch something to eat... (and the net can be a danger for what should not be caught).



However, nets are also used to protect - to protect birds, fruit and trees, and protect people from falling or flying objects, from insect infestation, and sometimes from each other... camouflage included.




Here, in this work, though, the net can also be seen as a slight and aesthetic protective covering for a sensitive natural habitat. "Tread with care", is the message, one way or another.

It is always important to me, to open up many different possibilities for association and reaction with my work, but not to prescribe any one line of thought or interpretation.

I think this simple work in the landscape between water and solid ground will give rise to many different perceptions.
The work will survive on site for more than 6 months. After this time, it can be decided whether to remove it, or to allow it gradually to return to nature and degrade naturally.

It is possible that some species of small animals will "colonise" the netting, making use of the structure it provides. In this case, it should, of course, be left for as long as it is useful to them.

The working title "tread softly" comes from a poem I grew up with:

He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet.
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

William Butler Yeats