



## **Alphabetti Theatre Commission – Callout for Writers**

### ***Life Stories of Infrastructure***

Alphabetti is inviting writers to propose a new piece of theatre inspired by *Life Stories of Infrastructure* (LSol), a research project led by Northumbria University.

This commission is about taking something that began in engineering, history and social science, and turning it into a live encounter with an audience. Both Alphabetti and the LSol team are interested in how theatre can hold lived experience, contradiction and emotion, and how it might help us think differently about the systems we live inside every day.

### **The Project**

*Life Stories of Infrastructure* is a three-year research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust and led by Professor Martin Crapper (Civil Engineering), Dr Leona Watson (History) and Dr Sharon Wilson (Social Science), alongside two PhD researchers.

The project looks at infrastructure not as something fixed or neutral, but as something that has a life: built with intention, shaped by use and neglect, argued over, remembered, and sometimes resisted. It examines how perceptions of infrastructure change over time, and what that might teach us about how we design and live with it in the future.

Research focuses on three North East transport infrastructures:

- **The A1 Road corridor, including the Western Bypass and Flyover**
- **Urban rail, from early electrified lines to the Tyne & Wear Metro**
- **The Tyne ferries, past and present**

Across these case studies are stories of people affected in very different ways: families whose homes were disrupted, workers whose access changed, commuters negotiating delay, and communities holding onto things they care about even as their function shifts.

At the heart of the project are questions that feel deeply theatrical:

- Who gains, and who loses?
- What is this infrastructure fundamentally for?
- What are people being asked to sacrifice - and for how long?
- Who gets a say, and who is missing from the conversation?
- What does progress actually feel like at ground level?
- Will anyone care about this in thirty years' time?



## **The Commission**

Using funding from Northumbria University, Alphabetti Theatre is commissioning one writer to develop a scripted theatre piece that responds to this research. The piece should:

- be performable by no more than two actors
- be either fictional, documentary, poetic or hybrid in form
- meaningfully respond to the research stories and questions
- focus on people: their memories, arguments, relationships, hopes, frustrations

The work does not need to explain the research. Instead, both Alphabetti and the LSol team are interested in what it *feels like* to live alongside these systems: what they take, what they give, and what they leave behind.

We're especially keen to see ideas that:

- Sit in complexity rather than easy answers
- Hold multiple viewpoints side by side
- Use time, memory and place as active ingredients
- Make space for humour, tenderness, anger or contradiction

Attached to this brief are some examples of verbatim dialogue gathered during the research project. We would encourage applicants to use these extracts to help inform their pitch, though we want to stress that using the verbatim dialogue as part of your script is not a requirement.

The final piece will form a creative outcome of the University's research project and be shared with public audiences at Alphabetti in early 2027.

## **Who This Is For**

This call is open to writers at any stage of their career who are excited by research-led theatre and working with real-world material.

We particularly welcome applications from writers based in the North East who are currently underrepresented in the theatre sector.



## **What to Submit**

At this stage we're asking for a pitch, not a finished script. We want to understand how you think, what draws you to this material, and how you might approach it theatrically.

Applications must include the following three elements, comprising no more than one A4 page per element (total application should be no more than three A4 sides):

**1. Short Bio** - This should give us a sense of who you are as a writer, your experience, and what shapes your practice.

**2. Play Proposal** - An outline of your idea for the piece, including:

- The central question or impulse
- How it relates to the research material
- How the piece might work with two actors
- Any thoughts on form, tone or style

**3. Dialogue Sample** - A short extract of dialogue that gives us a sense of your voice. This doesn't need to be from the proposed piece but should feel connected in tone or theme. While originality is important, proposals must clearly engage with the source material provided.

## **Timeline and Fee**

23<sup>rd</sup> September 2026, 11am – Applications Window Opens

19<sup>th</sup> October 2026, 5pm – Applications Window Closes

30<sup>th</sup> October 2026 – Selected Writer Announced

Late February 2027 (approx.) – Final draft of script delivered

April 2027 (approx.) – 30 min LSol piece performed at Alphabetti Theatre

The preferred applicant will work with the LSol research team and Alphabetti Artistic Director Ed Cole to realise a performance version of the script, which will run at no more than 30 minutes.

The commission fee for selected playwright is **£3,644**, in line with ITC/WGGB rates for a new play of 30 mins or less.



### **Selection**

Submissions will be read and discussed by Alphabetti's Creative Team, alongside members of the *Life Stories of Infrastructure* research team.

The selected proposal will be chosen on:

- Strength and clarity of the idea
- Depth of engagement with the research
- Suitability for the scale and form
- Quality of writing and theatrical thinking

### **How to Apply**

Please submit all materials as a single PDF or word document to [admin@alphabettitheatre.co.uk](mailto:admin@alphabettitheatre.co.uk), with the email title 'Life Stories of Infrastructure'.

If you have access requirements or would like to discuss alternative submission formats, please let us know.

We look forward to hearing from you.