

A couple of years ago, Isla explained that it became clear that just continuing the same business model wasn't an option. The company began to look at alternatives. Many brands and investors have sought to buy Islabikes over the years, so one option was to sell. Even after announcing it was ceasing production of bikes, Islabikes had offers. Isla couldn't agree to sell.

"Call it ego. I know that if I sold to another company, bicycles would be out there with my name on them that I wouldn't perceive to be right," she said. "Even if I did sell the business to someone who I did think would protect the value of the brand and have the same values, who knows who would run that in the future? I am so emotionally invested in the design of the bikes that I just couldn't bear the thought of it."

It was a stressful time. Isla worried about the current customers, all the bikes under guarantees, their parts so specialised – what would happen to them? Then a friend gave a left-field suggestion to just stop and scale right back.

### SCALING BACK

In the middle of all of this, in October 2023, Isla went on an evening bike ride wearing her helmet and cycling cap underneath, and the cap's peak obscured a large overhanging branch. Isla collided with the tree and suffered a severe concussion. It left her exhausted, dizzy and needing regular naps to get through the day. She was forced on doctor's orders to take it easy.

Islabikes ceased production and customers were notified. Isla became the sole shareholder again. "It wasn't like a pre-prepared plan but I am now very comfortable with where things have ended up. Islabikes as a business entity has continued – it hasn't gone bust, it doesn't owe anybody anything, it is an ongoing business that has been dramatically shrunk. We've stopped selling bicycles; we're still selling parts."

After selling more than 250,000 bikes over 18 years, Islabikes is back in a small stone barn. Isla and another member of staff support customers with sourcing bike parts to mend the well-loved Islabikes that are still in circulation.

"All the bikes sold out before Christmas 2023, but all our bikes need bits, from innertubes, tyres and grips to saddles. We still have all our spares for any of the bikes we made. The parts on the bikes were so carefully and obsessively designed by me to be as good as they could be."

Famously, Isla changed the design of handlebar grips on her bikes after a call from a surgeon who operated on many children who had been impaled in the tummy by the metal end, as most rubber grips are weak and easily damaged after the bike has been dropped a few times. Isla still hopes that all children's bike manufacturers will do likewise and go beyond the minimum safety recommendations. She's designed bikes for older



**Top:** Isla helps another young cyclist on the practice track at Islabikes in Ludlow, back in 2010

**Bottom:** After dealing with customer enquiries at the barn, Isla loads up her bike trailer and takes the orders to the post office four miles away

cyclists and shorter riders, too. It's clear she still has ideas on how to improve bikes for those the industry doesn't serve well.

### LOOKING AHEAD

The new way of working, back to a slower pace of life, clearly suits Isla. She was more reflective than the previous times we have chatted. Therapy, she said, had helped her and a diagnosis of ADHD two years ago has enabled her to understand her design processes and her particular ways of working. She seems content living in beautiful Ludlow with her wife, enjoying cycling adventures together and riding around the Shropshire Hills.

Every morning Isla cycles to the barn and deals with enquiries and orders from customers, then cycles to the post office with the orders. I wondered whether the new setup might be a new beginning for Islabikes, and asked if she planned to carry on designing bikes.

"There's a lot of good bikes out there," she said, "but the picky person that I am would still say that a lot of them could be better and so could the understanding of the fine details. All I am prepared to say at this stage is that I am still motivated by more children and others having access to better bikes, and I think when I have got through this initial period and have got things settled down, exploring ways to do that might be something that still interests me."

There's not enough space in the barn for making bikes, but Isla has a jig set up in her garage for making frames. Watch this space. ●

### Islabikes spares

If you need to buy spare parts for any Islabike purchased between 2005 and 2023, it can be a bit confusing to know what you need as the bike names are the same (e.g. Cnoc). However, the Islabikes website gives guidance on which parts fit the different models of Islabikes. It will help you to identify the model you have and show all the spare parts you can buy for them. You can also get a piece of cycle design history, Islabikes' ground-breaking brake lever for tiny hands, for £19.99. For details or ordering, visit [islabikes.co.uk](http://islabikes.co.uk).

“Islabikes as a business entity has continued... We've stopped selling bicycles; we're still selling parts”