

I have been fighting this misguided and nonsensical proposal for fifteen months, first as an individual, then as a founding member of Keep the Wannies Wild, the 2000-strong, grass roots movement established to both inform the public about, and protest against, Ascendant. I spoke on behalf of the objectors at the Strategic Planning Committee meeting on 2 July 2019 and was delighted that the application was rejected by a substantial majority.

I OBJECT to this second application as forcefully as I did to the first application and, more recently, to the appeal which, if a reminder were necessary, is still being considered by the Planning Inspectorate.

Why then, while the Planning Inspectorate deliberates the case for or against the first application, does the applicant consider it necessary to submit a second application? The answer is not because this second application represents an extraordinary improvement on the first, or that it is supported by valid, unchallengeable, fact-based research or even, Heaven forbid, that it addresses the numerous and very genuine concerns of the unremitting throng of objectors. Sadly, no. The answer is rooted in arrogance, amply demonstrated by the applicants audacious, profound and puffed-up sense of his own importance. Bad enough if this were a latter-day sense of importance. It is not. It is a sense of importance analogous of the medieval seigneur, of an era of master and servant, of those who seek to dominate and demand subservience.

The applicant considers Ascendant an example of the kind of “ambitious public art” which is “a key component of cultural place-making”. People living locally to the Wannies and specifically Cold Law, the unfortunate, inoffensive, tit-shaped hillock chosen as Ascendant’s location, see absolutely no need for cultural place-making. They consider their culture is perfectly fine, just as it is. The conceit of cultural place-making is, to them, as offensive as nation-building is to an Iraqi. Both, like Ascendant itself, seek to imperialise, to overbear and subjugate.

The founding premise that Ascendant is, in any way, connected to or recognises the life-long commitment of Her Majesty The Queen to her subjects, the nation or the Commonwealth is spurious. Any suggested similarity between Ascendant’s design and the blades of the compound steam turbine invented by Sir Charles Parsons, a previous owner of the applicant’s Northumberland estate, is factitious straw-clutching.

The applicant it seems, as long as he can admire Ascendant from the terrace of his country seat, cares nothing about the inadequate rural access to his chosen location, the paucity of local amenities or the scale of the environmental damage Ascendant will inflict on the Wannies and, in particular, on Cold Law itself. The hill will be cut in half. An estimated 1,150 cubic metres of 350-million-year-old rock will be removed during the excavation of the so-called rock slot; with reckless abandon, this will be crushed and turned into footpaths and a car park. The foundations will contain countless tons of concrete, poured sixty-metres deep into the earth. Desecration of this kind, and on this scale, in the name of art, together with the complete lack of respect for the environment which it demonstrates, is both obscene and insane.

The applicant’s paltry first exercise in public consultation was a sham. His more recent ‘survey’ of public opinion is devoid of internal and external validity. It gleans false positives from ill-informed respondents living everywhere in the extended north east region *except* the Wannies. As such, the respondents were unlikely to know anything of the relationship between the location and its many cultural associations in history, poetry and song. Nor were they able or qualified to adequately judge whether Ascendant would become a visitor attraction to rival others, an internationally revered artwork attracting countless visitors or the goose that lays golden eggs throughout the local or regional economy. The written support claimed by the applicant for the project is numerically small and pathetically shallow. The number comprises a few of his land-owning set, sometime leaders of industry and others of uncertain eminence. Only a handful live in the immediate area. Few, if any, have any background in the arts and, if they do, they have no sense of, nor feeling for, the location. Their responses are largely formulaic and based on one of the applicant’s glossy publicity *aides memoire*.

Ascendant has already been refused, TWICE. In its presentation, this second application is nearly identical to the first and adds nothing to the conversation. The second application is as flawed as the first, continuing to make the applicant’s case in assumptions and expressions of hope and possibility. The three new documents attached to it are, at best, dubious in their assertions and the *research* they contain cannot be regarded as valid. Hopes and aspirations are not a strategy. Comments from Keep the Wannies Wild members suggest Ascendant will actually be detrimental to local tourism, especially by those who seek outdoor pleasure in the Wannies. Ascendant will never be loved by the local community. Any pretence that it honours Her Majesty the Queen or the Commonwealth will be lost by what it will come to be known: Devonport’s Folly.

I urge the elected members of Northumberland County Council to REJECT this second application, upholding their carefully considered decision taken on 2 July 2019.