

**20/00698/FUL Objection to the construction of a publicly accessible landmark commission to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II and the Commonwealth. Land at Cold Law Kirkwhelpington Northumberland.**

Guy V Thouret

As a resident of West Woodburn, a keen walker and walk leader for Redesdale Ramblers; a founding member of the 'Keep the Wannies Wild' group now over 2K strong; an artist and constant recorder of the beautiful landscapes that surround where I feel so privileged to live, I object to the siting of the 56m abstract monumental industrial form called Ascendant, also referred to as the Elizabeth Landmark on Cold Law, locally known affectionately as 'Tit Hill'.

Having read through the proposal by Viscount Devonport's team, the attempts to justify claims that it will enhance the area through the use of questionnaires with dubious methodology where images are used to elicit responses, are unconvincing. Only when you are here on the ground in Redesdale and see for yourself in context the detrimental effect 56m of urban rusting corten steel will have on the landscape can a valid decision be made. Reference to tourist footfall and possible increases to local economy and jobs are added, but appear speculative and hollow to what will be lost forever. If the 56m Ascendant is to be built on cold law it not only destroys a much-loved natural local landmark, it will blight and dominate forever the natural beauty and remoteness of a beautiful upland rural area of Redesdale and in particular the Wannies. It is the remoteness of the area that is its important asset to tourism and the reason people come to visit and stay.

Poor consultation with the local community during the first attempt to gain planning permission has been well documented and no one I know was part of the limited sample in the more recent questionnaire mentioned above. I was more aware and still involved with Revitalising Redesdale projects, discovering, protecting, and improving wildlife habitats; investigating, preserving, and protecting the areas rich and diverse history and protecting and improving the areas biodiversity, than the Ascendant project. I first became aware of the significance of the Ascendant project in February 2019. Though I had been involved in creating wild flower meadows at St Cuthberts Church, Corsenside and live within walking distance of West Woodburn village hall, I was never aware of the 2018 exhibitions that were held at both these venues to inform local people about the three different proposals for Cold Law. I still find that surprising given Viscount Devonport's team's propensity for newspaper 'advertorials' when it suits them to promote his project. I was present at both Council Strategic Planning Committee meetings in June and July 2019. When the committee looked to be marginally going to vote against granting permission in June, a motion was past to do a site visit before a final vote. It proved to be decisive and led to the vote of 13 to 3 against allowing permission to construct. I think committee members became aware of the true scale and impact Ascendant would have on the environment and the local rural landscape of lower Redesdale and its communities. The rural context of this urban monolith is all important to a decision about its sensitivity to location.

Viscount Devonport's original inspiration for Ascendant is well documented on social media, but plenty of original promotional information is still available on social media, He has always been a great admirer of the Waterloo Monument to the Duke of Wellington near Ancrum, a 150ft tower on top of a hill called Penil Heugh that dominates all in its vicinity. Whatever Lord Devonport wanted to create it had to be big and dominate all around it. That has always been a primary objective. At 56m, three times the height of the Angel of the North and stuck on a hill, Ascendant will un-naturally pierce the skyline and scream out to all, 'HERE I AM!' This titan will displace and reinvent a beautiful remote landscape steeped in a varied rich local history that still marks the landscape and will confine it to the dustbin. A phrase that concerns me in Viscount Devonport's team's submission is 'ambitious public

art is now a key component of cultural place making'. There is to be a grandiose scheme which will have little overt reference to Redesdale or the Wannies, other than design driver excuses for the monuments visual form.

Cold Law is a greenfield site! A monumental sculpture in the context of this remote environment will add no further value to it but be an overpowering distraction. It will provide no indication to what can be discovered here, nor celebrate the rich rural environment in which it is situated. This is no Angel of the North or Kelpies both figurative monuments of character and situated on brownfield sites in redevelopment areas next to major motorways and towns. They provide new identities and relate in general to local past history in those urban industrial areas where all that had been before had been levelled for redevelopment on a 'blank canvas'. Ascendant is a non-figurative abstract work within a range of upland Hills steeped in local history with intrigue and mystery where you can discover new wonders if you look with care. Unlike urban areas the marks of the past can still be seen within the landscape Neolithic burial mounds, hill forts, round houses, a Roman fort, Robin of Risingham (a Roman statue), the 12<sup>th</sup>C. medieval fishponds and the bastles of the Reivers are just a few. Northumberland isn't known as the Secret Kingdom for no reason. To compare Ascendant to the Kielder Sculpture Park is also not a valid comparison. At least the sculptures do not pierce the skyline like Ascendant but sit within the forest to be discovered. I am particularly fond of Silvanus Maximus which has weathered well and now inhabits its location.

An urban industrial, rusting steel veined, 56m non-figurative form resembling a 'blade' tilting south, regardless of what it is meant to represent, when placed on Cold Law has the sole purpose to dominate, be overbearing and to subjugate the hill and all around. Contrived criteria linking the structure to the locality were used to set its minimum height. Placing it on a hill in a remote rural area serves to increase its insensitivity to the landscape and accentuate domination. The abstract form likened to a turbine blade will damage the hill irreparably. The analogy of 'root canal surgery' of a hill seems apt to create reinforced concrete land anchors to hold the structure in place. This just seems so wrong to do in any remote rural landscape. Change the topography of the hill and the local nickname for Cold Law will be lost forever with its outline against the sky irrevocably transformed. Impose a 56m urban industrial structure on this remote hill and you simply urbanise a rural area. It is the dream of one person and though Viscount Devonport wishes to dedicate it to the Queen and Commonwealth, to my knowledge, it is a venture Her Majesty has yet to endorse

The carbon foot print of this titan will be huge with little or no return! What is ethical or ecological about the 200 tons of steel required to fabricate the 'blade' and heaven knows how many tons of reinforced concrete to support it! I was assured by a structural engineer that the angle Ascendant sits at will require substantial groundwork. To pollute a green field site in a remote rural area is vandalism of the countryside on par with fly tipping, especially when the form is a brutal 56m urban rusting steel blade leaning south. The site will also require a car park for visitors, so a large area will require levelling, solid foundations and hopefully be only topped with gravel. At this point in time the National trust is looking to reducing its carbon footprint and that of its visitors with a policy of focusing on historic 'attractions' within or in close proximity to towns rather than in rural areas in an effort to encourage the use of public, rather than private transport to gain access. The remote location of Ascendant on an unclassified road the D195 will mostly be reliant on visitors with private transportation. We live in an area where public transportation is limited in the extreme. Viscount Devonport's dream is from a bygone age where an attraction's carbon footprint and those who visit it were not so much a key issue as they are today.

Successful monumental sculptures are usually situated beside major trunk roads, the Angel of The North in Gateshead, beside the A1M and the Kelpies beside the M9 near Grangetown. Ascendant on the D195 will have limited, mostly local traffic passing by it. Though the D195 has had some

upgrading and now boasts painted white lines to mark the lanes, those lanes still remain narrow. When cars meet wider oncoming farm vehicles, vans or lorries, one or the other has to stop or slow down to allow the other to pass safely. Blind and sharp bends, steep climbs and blind crests are a feature of the road and the junctions with the A696 and A68 require caution because of poor sight lines. Also to be noted on the D195 is the narrow single track bridge to be crossed after the A696 junction, immediately followed by a right hand bend and a steep inclined left hand blind bend climb out of a narrow valley. It is awkward for cars to negotiate with caution, let alone large coaches. The road is also used to move farm animals from field to field so 'sheep and cow jams' are not an uncommon occurrence. Sheep often find a way onto the roadside especially during lambing when some lambs appear to find escape routes from fields with regularity. I once encountered a cow with a calf grazing on the roadside of the D195.

Sadly accidents do happen in our area because of the nature of the roads. If accidents are serious, the roads are closed and residents and through traffic are diverted. Unlike urban areas diversions can be anything up to 10 to 15+ miles on narrow, often single track roads. Both the main 'A' classified roads the A696 and A68 are also notorious for accidents. Submissions from Viscount Devonport's team say Ascendant will be seen from the A68 some 3.5 miles away (I'd say it will be even further than that) and that its 'unexpected nature' will 'draw the attention of the inquisitive driver'. In the time it took you to read 'its unexpected nature will draw the attention of the inquisitive driver'. you could have had an accident.

To attempt to bring a larger volume of people with cars into an area which can't cope, just to see a themed attraction, which has little to do with Redesdale will have unwanted consequences. No amenities on site and parking spaces for 17 cars and a coach may result in damaged road verges as visitors park where they can on the D195. Road safety problems will ensue and 'wild toileting' become prevalent. Litter will increase and some dogs may end up off leash worrying sheep. The experience at Castle Rigg Hill where a sculpture was placed in a wild part of the North Yorkshire Moors National Park in the full glare of media publicity is a case in point. The sculpture was in situ for a year, during which time the local suffered continuous disruption and abuse of the landscape. Once built, Ascendant can't be removed and will be there over one hundred years. It is said that visitors to Ascendant will be directed to amenities in Ridsdale, West Woodburn, Otterburn and Kirkwhelpington. Kirkwhelpington has one public toilet, the others none that I know of that I know of. West Woodburn and Otterburn have pubs or hotels and Ridsdale a community pub. We already have litter and wild toileting problems on the A68 at lay-bys. The north-bound lay-by situated after the D195 junction with the A68 and between Ridsdale and West Woodburn can be particularly blighted!

The industrial form of Ascendant is said to reflect the North East's heavy industrial past, but to place it in a remote rural area appears to me to be a bizarre decision. No matter what the design drivers concocted, links to northern industrial giants such as Sir Charles Parsons and Lord Armstrong to Ascendant appear to be tentative. Sir Charles Parsons was a previous owner of the Ray Demesne Estate but he used it purely as a retreat and to enjoy its moorland uplands for grouse shooting and Sweethope Loughs to indulge his passion for fishing. Similarly Lord Armstrong had his Craggside Estate to retreat to. Sir Charles Parsons may have designed the first marine steam turbine engine, but his industrial activities were confined to the industrial hub of the Newcastle and River Tyne. I think he would despair at how the estate looks today. It was given to the Land Commission by his daughter in 1947 and all but agricultural land was managed by the Forestry Commission which began to create tree plantations on the moorland. It was offered for sale in 1954 and bought by the trustees of the 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount of Devonport. Tree plantations continued to be introduced after purchase.

The Iron Works and village of Ridsdale developed during the years 1836/38, because of the discovery of iron ore in Redesdale. By 1846/7 the works were failing. Lord Armstrong bought the lot, the works and mines, at well below market value. The foundry was asset stripped and much was

moved to his Elswick Works in Newcastle. The Iron ore mines were what he was really after. By then the railways had reached Woodburn and he had a branch line built to transport iron ore easily to Elswick from the Broomhope Valley mines. By 1864, cheaper imports from Spain made the local mines uneconomic and they were closed. In terms of local industrial fortunes the monument is more a reminder of failure and a rich industrialist's opportunism. The positioning of a monument with a strong industrial heritage is better suited to areas where industry successfully thrived for many years, such as Elswick in Newcastle, rather than somewhere where such activity in historical terms was relatively brief. The industrial revolution began in unlikely rural settings where the raw materials and rural labour existed, but polarised in populous large town areas offering more plentiful cheap labour and better infrastructure. Industrial activity in this area lasted no more than 27yrs. Over 160yrs on, it has reverted back to its rural roots, while places like Elswick continuously maintained more of its industrial characteristics for well over 180yrs. Ascendant's industrial urban look would be less of an anachronism in such a setting. In Redesdale and the Wannies it will just be brutal! I also don't think the National Trust would accept such a structure as Ascendant on Lord Armstrong's Cragside country retreat if it were to be offered to them! I have already stated that monuments to the past are etched into the landscape of this rural area, unlike overbuilt urban areas where they often face demolished or erasure in the guise of progress. Monuments to Redesdale's place in the industrial revolution still exist, the Iron Foundry at Ridesdale and the 19<sup>th</sup> century spoil heaps of the Broomhope Valley iron ore mines. The foundry has undergone extensive preservation work through the auspices of Revitalising Redesdale to save it for the future. Unlike now, 19th century legislation did not require mining companies to restore landscapes to 'as they were' after mining. Being in such a remote area the spoil heaps have survived relatively intact and classed as one of the best preserved 19thC spoil heaps in the country. Over time nature has slowly been taking them back. Some are now covered in woodland. I have heard some rumours that the spoil heaps may be the object of a preservation order! No further industrial landmarks are required and at least these ones are representative of the Industrial revolution that occurred and more importantly they sit within the landscape!

Under the present Lord Devonport, A wind farm sits on the Ray Estate. It too was originally refused planning permission because of the proximity of another, the Greenrigg Wind Farm, south of the Great Wanney Crag. The then Minister of State for Energy over-ruled the Northumberland CC decision, because of green energy policies, but also stated that by granting planning permission for the project no further permissions were to be granted for any future construction in the area. Viscount Devonport must be aware of this, but has still arrogantly continued with his 'dream' folly. The wind turbines have been used as an argument for Ascendant's erection on Tit Hill, based on the assertion that industrial structures exist close by. I find this argument spurious. Though they are unwelcomed, I accept wind turbines have a purpose, but they also have a finite operational lifespan and will eventually be removed in approximately 20 to 25yrs. During that time hopefully other less invasive green energy production methods may come into existence. Ascendant on the other hand serves no other purpose than itself and will be built to last over one hundred years with no carbon-free energy payback after polluting and urbanising a remote rural green-field site!

Tit Hill can be viewed from many places throughout lower Redesdale. It sits at the head of the Lises Burn Valley on the edge of the beautiful hills and crags known as 'The Wannies' which are celebrated in Northumbrian song, prose and poetry. The Wannies are also a part of Northumbrian language through such expressions as, 'He lives in the wilds of Wanney' meaning, 'He lives in a remote area' or, 'Where've you been, the wilds of Wanney?' meaning 'You're late!'. Many people who visit the area thought 'The Wannies' were a mythical place and have expressed delight to find out it does actually exist. The erection of this monument despoils the roots of this Northumbrian cultural heritage. The positioning of a monument with urban industrial origins is better suited to areas where industry

successfully thrived, not a remote rural area that relies on its very remoteness for tourism. We are custodians of this landscape for future generations. The Wannies and Redesdale still inspires artists; nourishes discovery and feeds the psyche and wellbeing. There are so few unique areas in our English landscape that can offer such qualities and they desperately need to be preserved. Redesdale and the Wannies are as wild an area as you can get to cycle, climb, walk and fish and feel you are alone with nature. A New themed attraction may only change the visitor-base, not attract more. Those who believed Northumberland CC's tourist information, to come and explore Northumberland's wild uplands and remote rural landscape where, 'you can feel alone and be better for it', will cease to come to the area. What was said to be on offer will be lost and they will go elsewhere to find it. They are the tourists we need to encourage and retain because invariably they are the tourists that leave the landscape as they found it!

If Ascendant is allowed to sit on Cold Law, the skyline becomes fractured and remoteness is lost. It will sit there vainly screaming, 'LOOK AT ME!' To maintain Cold Law's natural beauty is crucial to our skyline and to keeping the cohesion of the subtle pattern of relationships between all hills. Radically change one and all cohesion is lost. The 'look at me' one becomes dominant! Walks, climbs and cycle routes are blighted throughout the area as the eye is forced to look in one direction where a spike abruptly breaks through subtle skylines in unexpected places.

To say Ascendant is 'sensitive' to the landscape based on the premise that it is the profile of a slice removed from the summit of Tit Hill and then elevated, does not make the resulting form appear any the less alien, not least because of the nature of the material used in its construction, rusting corten steel. The assertion to liken Ascendant to hill forts as just another 'incremental 'stage of monument in the area I find weak. Hill forts had a purpose. They provided protection, defence and hopefully survival. It was about the people who lived here and built by them for them. Ascendant is Ascendant. It is being imposed! The form resting at an obtuse angle with the point elevated accentuates an upward thrust as if an unknown force had caused it to pierce the hill from below. The simplicity of the form accentuates this. The artist refers to his work as a blade, saying his inspiration came from a steam turbine blade from Sir Charles Parsons' invention and is reflected in the blades of the Ray Wind Farm turbines. Regardless of these 'design drivers', the resulting simple, non-figurative form is both a strength and weakness. It can be whatever you want it to be, but it comes with a lot of unwanted baggage. Ascendant is not a benign form! The words 'blade' and 'pointed' have been used to describe the structure. Say dagger, bayonet, assegai, sword, spear, spike, barb, and knife; they are all 'blades' and regardless of the original intent of the artist, the unwanted associations are difficult to dismiss.

The point raised at an obtuse angle aggravates this feeling of aggression as any pointed object raised at such an angle would. Compare Ascendant to the Three Swords monument at Stavanger in Norway created to commemorate an important battle and the difference in attitude is noticeable. The swords are overtly giant Viking swords, weapons for killing, but with the points buried in the rock they are less threatening than the tilting sharp pointed blade presented by Ascendant. The three swords are perpendicular, balanced and feel at peace. Being three is important symbolism because of the hilts, as it also eludes to Christianity.

Lord Devonport wishes to dedicate his monument to Her Majesty and the Commonwealth. It's his main headline to attract attention, but is it an appropriate monument? I fear Ascendant reflects more the creation of empire rather than being representative of how Her Majesty the Queen helped oversee the peaceful transition of colonies of the British Empire to be independent self-governing states in a loose confederation of peaceful nations known as The Commonwealth.

One thing I am definitely sure about is that this monument is in no way sympathetic to the environment in which one person wants to place it and without care wishes to impose it on his neighbours! The geography is 'majestic and unique.' Why subvert it? The local history is still marked

in the landscape. Why trample on it! Local prose, poems music and songs celebrate it, but will be silenced! Leave the Wannies wild to enjoy their secrets and the delight in discovering them without looking back to see a domineering spike. It will be like being in Mordor!