

Mary Ann Rogers

Interested party for Cold Law PI

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My name is Mary Ann Rogers. I am an artist and gallery owner. My home and gallery are just outside of West Woodburn and the view from the front of our place includes the area known as the Wannies.

My credentials and roles within the community of artists and education are included in my letter at core document K.6.1 Appendix F.

I am very much involved in the community of artists in the north east. Among my roles, I have been director of Queens Hall arts centre, Hexham, and also of Network artists. I jointly ran the Art Tour, an open studio event, as well as 'Tapping into Tourism' which brought the regions artists and accommodation providers together to create a truly unique offering for visitors. I am also trustee of Chilli Studios, an arts project for people with mental health problems in Newcastle.

I have lived in my present home for 35 years, operating as an art gallery for most of those years, and invested in building an art gallery in 2006. Every year, I welcome hundreds of visitors; both local people and visitors from further afield. Almost without exception, people comment on the view to the hills across the valley and express their admiration.

I network closely with other retail and accommodation businesses in area.

My visitor's book is full of comments. What visitors to the area consistently mention are the wide-open spaces, the quiet roads and the wild open countryside which typifies this particular part of Northumberland. I consider myself extremely lucky to live here.

My connection to the Wannies, a short distance from my home, is palpable. The Wannies road, which links the A68 and A696, is about 7 miles long, and winds its way across wild open countryside, with the outcrops of sandstone crags known as Great Wanny and Little Wanny to the south; Cold Law and the abandoned Wannies railway line to the north. At almost the precise point where the monument is proposed, the road turns a corner and it is as if the whole of the Scottish border, the Cheviot Hills and Kielder Forest are laid before me in a vast breathtaking panorama. The views never fail to lift my spirits on the drive home. I regularly walk through the Wannies, either from the forest access road from the south side, just above Ridsdale, or from the Wannies road, near Summit Cottages. As an artist, I find this place endlessly inspiring. My work covers both wildlife painting also landscapes. I have many times spent hours drawing and painting the area, enjoying both the views and the wildlife. It is very rare to walk through the area and not spot a roe deer, a raptor or even an adder in the summer.

Something about the raw wildness and the sheer expanse of the views speak to my heart. I have thought deeply about most of the troubles in my life here, and resolved many of them whilst walking through the Wannies.

The thought that someone wishes to rip up the earth, dig deep into the little hill know as 'Tit Hill', fill it with concrete and steel substructure in order to erect a colossal Corten steel monument, which will appear like a sword or rapier in this most special place is utterly heart breaking.

Public art is of great interest to me. Amongst my friends, I count many artists who create public art, winning commissions all over the world. It is a matter of great pride to walk along the quayside in Newcastle, or pass by a public park in Wallsend, or a road junction and enjoy the uplifting work of people who I know. My husband and I frequently holiday in the UK and seek out public art such as The Scallop, by Maggie Hambling at Aldeburgh, or 'Another Place' by Anthony Gormley at Crosby. We enjoy some of the public art at Kielder and recently enjoyed stumbling across a piece by Andy Goldsworthy commissioned by the appellant near to Sweethope. I absolutely believe there is space for public art in both cities and the countryside. Degas said that "art is not what one sees, but what one must make others see". In other words, art is a type of communication, an unspoken exchange between the creator and the viewer. Public art especially needs to connect with the viewer and elicit a response of surprise, for example, or delight, curiosity or even shock. But the shape, scale and material of Ascendant is completely out of place and inappropriate for the location in which it is proposed. I would not be uplifted by it; it would not enhance any walk if discovered by chance and I don't think we would even visit it out of curiosity.

No amount of interpretation boards, purported symbolism, contrived little pathways, engraved words or other, man-made artifice can change the bare fact of a curved steel spike jutting upwards, pointlessly and unwanted in our shared countryside.

Like everyone, we have been affected by Covid, but my business, and that of nearby 'Slate & Nature' have managed to thrive by making the most of the online selling opportunity; we both experienced above average online sales at Christmas.

I am also aware that many of the local accommodation businesses, far from struggling, are anticipating the busiest summer ever. Kelly findler, owner of Redewater lakeside Lodges in West Woodburn told me they are inundated with bookings and enquiries. Deb Walton, who owns Glampods, a luxury Glamping site near otterburn told me that their marketing is all about the beauty, wildness and peace of this area, and the proposed Landmark goes against everything they stand for and would be a blight on the area. The high end holiday house on the Crag estate is fully booked this summer, and they have permission to build a new holiday house. Debbie Longlands, owner of Sycamore cottage and glampods near Birtley says that the peace and tranquility of the area is their USP and she says they are very busy. Iben Broust, owner of Riverdale Hall the largest hotel in the area, told me they are taking a lot of bookings and expecting a very fruitful summer. Their guests rave about the natural beauty of the area, the trees, rivers, lakes and beaches, and that landmark will never blend in and the proposed landmark will never blend in.

So, you see, it simply isn't the case that the local tourist industry is devastated. It benefited from a surge of visitors in 2020, and is set to be even more popular in 2021. It certainly does not need 'Ascendant' to help it; it only needs the beautiful, wild, unspoilt open landscapes with its quiet roads which bring visitors back to this area year after year

If this Public Inquiry overturns Northumberland County Council's correct decision, this will be a source of great unhappiness in the area and I personally will spend the next 20+ years explaining to visitors to my gallery what it is, and apologising for not trying hard enough to prevent it being built.

Please uphold the decision and put an end to the senseless waste of time and energy that has been spent in trying to save this special place from being ruined by a huge, unwanted, inappropriate expression of one man's vanity.