

My name is Neil Milburn. I am a qualified Town Planner and for the last 20 years I have worked for Barratt Homes. I have held the role of Development Director for the last 15 years and head up the land and planning functions of the North East Division. I have lived in the North East for 50 of my 56 years and I have visited the site on numerous occasions

I wish to speak in support of the appeal by Viscount Devonport against the refusal of Northumberland County Council (NCC) of an application to construct a publicly accessible monument, commissioned to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II and the Commonwealth at Cold Law.

Being a proud bearer of my given name 'Milburn' I can be nothing more than a supporter of the North East. The Region has suffered terrible decline for over 100 years and no one will disagree with me when I say it needs to stand on its own feet.

The countryside of the North East has been constantly changing since time began. It moves and it lives. I am no countryside expert, but I know what attracts me to the countryside. I like to see the impact that man has had on an environment. I like old railway lines, I like quarries, I like long forgotten villages and industries, and I like new wind turbines, walks, agricultural sheds, and even reservoirs. Everything that was there or is there now, is for a reason. It's a fantastic experience to ponder and ask yourself 'why was this here?' To look around and imagine what it looked like and how it affected the people who lived and worked around in that area. Why did man do that?

The area in question at this appeal, has a rich history of man. The A68 itself, a vital artery dating back to Roman times. It is littered with quarries that provided the stone for buildings and the many miles of stone walls. The village of Ridsdale contained a foundry, and that provided iron for the High Level Bridge. It is criss crossed with former railway lines that once moved the resources that made the area great. Today, it is home to many a tree plantation, sitting awkwardly or squarely in the landscape, and also many wind turbines. Strangely beautiful in their appearance and impact.

Like many people, I visit the countryside as a destination, see what I want to see, do what I want to do and move on. A Landmark piece of art, is a destination. It is something we need to celebrate. The Angel of The North had many objectors, but today it is a symbol, loved by the population and known nationally.

Despite all the Council's talk about diversifying the economy, the talk about generating income and wealth for its residents, the talk about attracting people to its built and rural areas.

The talk!

The case of this proposal, I am afraid to say, is yet another example of the talk but no walk. They not only fail to support but cause additional expense and delay.

In this proposal, we witness the North East trying to stand on its own feet. A wholly privately funded initiative, and accessible without charge. We have a proposal that will assist in

levelling out the Regional inequalities, assist in the renaissance of the North, and assist our economy.

We have a proposal that the professional officers who were involved in the application accepted as beneficial and sustainable, both in the local and wider context. An independent landscape expert instructed by the Council supported that opinion. The landscape in this area has not stood still for many hundreds of years. It has changed radically and changed again. The addition of this landmark is simply a further evolution.

The economic, environmental and social benefits are clearly spelt out by both Officers in their report to Committee and the appellant in their case. They are compelling.

Turning to the contrary decision by Members, it is clear that Members didn't know on what grounds to refuse and left it to Officers, who could only provide a weak offering lacking clarity.

I would like to remind the inquiry of the position of the Director of Tourism of Northumberland County Council. He provides a succinct summary and balance of the evidence and I believe the proposal is entirely consistent with the following objectives identified by the Director in order to achieve sustained growth in tourism in the County:

- **Encouraging more visits** and especially longer ones
- **Extending the season with visits taking place across the whole year** and not just in the summer
- **Encouraging visitors to spend more locally through encouraging them to see, experience and take part in more of the opportunities Northumberland has to offer**
- **Continually driving up the quality of the county's tourism offer through demonstrating and promoting excellence and innovation**
- **Raising the profile of the county** as a great place to work, live, visit and invest
- **Helping to create attractive places and experiences for local people to enjoy**
- **Helping to sustain and develop services and opportunities for local people.**

I cannot offer a greater and more succinct summary to the proposal than this.

If I may move to some points of detail that I believe also fully support the application.

I note that the appellant carefully choose the artist after a competition and extensive public consultation. The scheme was supported by the Council's professional officers when carrying out the necessary planning balance.

The appellant has explained how the landmark has been designed to mirror and complement its historic, topographical and environmental surroundings. Its AOD height would mirror its neighbour Hepple Heugh and the Queen Victoria cairn. The sculpture itself does mimic the hill and its design takes support from many historic artefacts, creating interest in itself. It has been conceived as both a landmark and a future asset to the Region in terms of its existence and a tourist attraction.

I note the scheme is supported by a comprehensive Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment that demonstrates that no significant adverse impacts on the landscape would arise. These conclusions are endorsed by a consultant employed by the Council to undertake an independent review of the LVIA. With the benefit of this further independent verification officers reported to Committee that the proposal "...would not result in unacceptable effects on the landscape character or visual amenity in accordance with the requirements of the NPPF or TLDFCS"

I also note the agreed ecological benefits to the proposal. I quote the County Ecologist, "There is good potential for the enhancement of habitats through reduced grazing pressure, creation of low nutrient substrates, some native tree and shrub planting, and re-wetting of drained land". He adds that this commitment shall result in improvements to biodiversity in line with the aim of the NPPF.

In terms of its setting, as is clear to anyone who visits the location, the appeal site is located within a landscape and countryside which has altered radically over history. It is located on publically accessible land in an area that is dominated by manmade interventions such as an existing quarry, a disused railway line and two large windfarms. It can be a specific destination, or a stop off.

In adding to the facilities and destinations available in the County, I support the opinion of the Council's Director of Tourism that the appeal scheme will encourage visitors and aid the local economy. I believe this accords with the tourism policies in the Local Plan.

I completely agree that the proposed landmark would provide a new cultural tourism attraction to build on the existing strategic cultural offer in the county of Northumberland. This would also help to sustain existing facilities and services in local settlements and provide local employment opportunities.

I believe the proposal fulfils the 3 strands of sustainable development as defined by the NPPF:

Economic – it will deliver a number of economic benefits to the local and the wider regional economy. It will attract additional visitors to Northumberland complement existing tourism offers in the county, thereby reinforcing the attractiveness of the offer in the county

Social – it will deliver a free to visit landmark, that can be viewed by anyone individually or collectively with its surroundings. It is accessible by a large number of methods, walking,

cycling or vehicular. It will generate engagement amongst the local community and encourage health and vitality, and bring pleasure to all by drawing people in to this part of the countryside.

Environmental – it will enhance the natural, built and historic environments of both the locality and the North East. It will improve biodiversity.

For all the above reasons, I urge you to allow this appeal.

Thank you

Neil Milburn