

## PUBLIC ENQUIRY PRESENTATION

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

My name is Steve Blake, I am a local climber and mountaineer and have been active in Northumberland for over 50 years. I am a member, and have been President of, the Northumbrian Mountaineering Club, the regions senior club. However, the first club I joined in 1972, was the appropriately named Wanneys Climbing Club which is based in Morpeth and still going strong. indeed, the Wanneys was the first crag I visited aged 11. I am also the British Mountaineering Council's Volunteer Access and Conservation Representative for Northumberland. A role I have undertaken for five years.

I would point out that unlike the members of the appellants team, I, and the other people on this side of the argument are not being paid to come before you. If Vicount Devonport's team weren't being paid, they simply wouldn't be here. I say this, because if they weren't here presenting on his behalf, there would be only one person present arguing in favour of the development. Whilst the appellant's team has submitted an impressive amount of paperwork, it could be summarised into a sentence which is 'Because Viscount Devonport wants it', won't accept no for an answer, and has pockets deep enough to gnaw away at it.

It is patriarchy at its worst.

The Wanneys have a long climbing history, first being climbed on in 1902 by Geoffry Wintrop Young and the Trevellyans of Wallington Hall. Within the UK, climbing in Northumberland is noted for it's particular 'wildness' and the spectacular settings the crags are in. Indeed Winthrop Young wrote:

'There is no nobler county than that of Northumberland, as it rolls processionally northward to the border in great waves of coloured and historic moorland, cresting upon the skyline into sudden and surprising crags which crown for us the magnificent walking and admirable rocks'

Great Wanney, along with East Woodburn and Aid Crag are home to a number of magnificent rock climbs and are popular across all levels of ability not least because of their superb setting and outlook, with vistas sweeping north to the borderlands. It is a crag of national significance and attracts climbers from around the UK. Indeed it graces the cover of the current edition of the climbing guide to the County.

I note with interest the Appellants opinion in response to some KTWW objections. In particular Para 10.4.2 I quote 'That the scheme does not materially affect the Great Wanney Crag, nor does it reduce or materially affect in any way the enjoyment which climbers gain (albeit, it is difficult to see how any climber ascending the Crag would have any view of the Landmark given that he would have his back to it). (They really think they've got us there!) and continues: 'Whilst views gained by climbers at the top and others may change as a consequence of the Landmark, these have been 'assessed'.

This response is typical of the patronising, and condescending way in which they have responded to objections throughout this process. They wouldn't actually know about the concerns and objections of those who already visit and use the landscape: rock climbers, walkers, rambles, mountain bikers, runners, bird watchers, naturalists, road and touring cyclists and photographers. (I could go on!) I know my community was not 'consulted', and I see no evidence in their submissions to you, that any other representative bodies whose members might be affected, were either.

I would also add that all of those groups I have just mentioned 'dwell' in the landscape when they visit, and do so repeatedly. They are actually using the local facilities now, and putting money into the local economy now. And the draw for all of these groups is the landscape as it is now. Collectively the numbers are huge, and I would suggest significantly greater than any, the monument might attract.

To suggest that the structure wouldn't be a problem because climbers would have their 'back to it' is dismissive and disingenuous. Any climber, or other user approaching from the west will have to drive beneath it. Those approaching from the east will see it ahead of them. Climbers at the top of the crag will be looking directly at it. As would those descending. It will be seen from the base when having lunch, and it will be visible when walking out from the crag. All of this is the same for East Woodburn crag 1.8km to the north and Aid Crag, and Little Wanney to the South. The only time it wouldn't intrude is during the few minutes it takes to complete a climb. Either, they don't know what they are talking about, or, are patronising and dismissive, or are being deliberately disingenuous, or perhaps all of these things. I would suggest this response calls into question the quality and accuracy of all their evidence and opinion. Regardless, Our view is that the structure is an 82m high inappropriate, unnecessary and unwanted intrusion into the landscape

The Appellant's case makes much of the cultural importance of the structure and how it will 'enhance' local culture and have a 'social role'. He has of course, linked it to the Queen in a tenuous attempt to legitimise what is really a homage to wind turbines. If you didn't know the monument was supposedly in honour of the Queen, there is absolutely nothing about the design that would reveal any such connection.

He proposes a link to 'local writing projects'... The irony here is remarkable, given the Wanneys have featured in Northumbrian folk law, song and literature for a couple of hundred years without the assistance of a monument.

The appellant also seems to believe that the existence of the windfarms to the south west and north east are reasons and excuse enough justify this construction. Given the parlous state of the environment, I can accept the windfarms are a necessary and temporary evil. I am not a Nimby. But If you stand atop the crag and extend your arms, pointing at the two windfarms, and then look straight ahead, you have in front of you an unspoilt vista, an arc of 180 degrees that extends beyond Ridsdale to the Border. It is magnificent and in my view worth protecting. The presence and intrusion of the windfarms make protecting this surviving view all the more important. Not less so! Moreover, the same applies from East Woodburn Crag, from where the structure would dominate the view to the south.

It is because the windfarms are necessary and temporary that they are tolerable. But, this structure, isn't necessary at all! It is only necessary in Viscount Devonport's mind. This isn't a village by-pass, a new school or, bridge that would link and restore a community. It would be frivolous, if the potential outcome weren't so serious. The predictions they make of tourist revenue and associated benefits are nothing more than opinion, and I've already pointed out the weakness in the quality of their opinion. There is no certainty here, they are ambitious 'predictions'. If the 'venue' was going to be so popular as to have an impact on the local economy then the car park would need to be much bigger surely. Those people who do either stumble across it, or conduct a deliberate visit will probably go to the site, then simply go home. Unlike all the user groups I mentioned earlier who dwell in the landscape, visitors to the monument are unlikely to return, why would you? The suggestion that it would generate local jobs and benefit the local economy is laughable. In the initial application the appellants made much reference to the impact of 'public art' and drew comparison with installations at Kielder and the Angel of the North. As ever, they were, and are very selective in what they present. The fact that all of Kielder's art is either hidden in the forest or, so far away that it can't be seen by the residents, is never mentioned. In regard to the Angel of the North they refer to 'high' visitor numbers which given the Angel is on the edge of a population of over 1,000,000 is hardly surprising. Context is everything and the appellant's team is very selective in choosing the context of the supposed 'evidence' submitted to you.

As a climber I'm very used to taking and assessing risks; considering the potential consequences should I making an error of judgement. Granting the appellant permission, and allowing the construction of this structure is a huge risk. Whilst the appellant's team has submitted an impressive amount of paperwork, it could be summarised into a sentence which is 'Because Viscount Devonport wants it', won't accept no for an answer, and has pockets deep enough to gnaw away at it. It is patriarchy at its worst.

To conclude I would ask you to

Consider this, If it does get approval, and is built, and then, as we objectors believe, turns out to be an inappropriate, unnecessary and, unwanted blot on the landscape what happens then? Unlike a bad hairdressing mistake, it cannot be fixed or grow out! The local community, visitors, and users who love the Wanneys and the landscape as it is, would be stuck with it forever. It is an unthinkable consequence. Given our and the local authorities view that it is inappropriate, unnecessary, and unwanted, approval is a massive risk, with huge negative consequences that would stretch well into the future. People would wonder what on earth we were doing.

Thank you.