

**PICK YOUR BATTLES**

*A CGI of Lord Devonport's proposed sculpture - Ascendant: The Elizabeth Landmark, designed by Simon Hitchens - which will be nearly three times as high as Antony Gormley's Angel of the North*

# ONE LORD AND HIS BLADE OF GLORY

**EYESORE, ECO PERIL OR NOBLE ART?  
A NORTHUMBRIAN LANDOWNER'S PLANS  
TO RAISE A SKY-SCRAPING SCULPTURE IN  
HONOUR OF THE QUEEN HAS MET WITH  
CONTROVERSY. EILIDH HARGREAVES  
MEETS A VISCOUNT WITH A VISION**

# Knives out for towering spike to honour the Queen

Viscount wins planning appeal to build sculpture three times as high as Angel of the North

By Poppie Platt

A SCULPTURE dedicated to the Queen, which is three times the size of the Angel of the North, has been given the go-ahead, after a viscount won a plan-

Artist Simon Hitchens has designed the sculpture, right, to stand on land owned by Viscount Devonport, below, in Northumberland

opment would have a "minimal impact on the natural environment" while celebrating the reign of the Queen.

Viscount Devonport said: "It is our ambition to create a sculpture that is not only celebratory of Queen Elizabeth II and The Commonwealth, but which is also a magnificent piece of artwork that acts as a beacon for visitors and tourists to the region."

The initial planning application had been approved by the council's officers, but its planning committee ruled that

TERENCE KEARLEY, THE 3RD Viscount Devonport, is waiting for me in the car park of an abandoned petrol station in remote Northumberland, just off the A696. Two lambs lie nose to nose on a grassy verge, asleep, as the 77-year-old viscount descends from his Toyota 4x4. He is swathed in tweed, a fishing button pinned to a cap concealing a raft of yellow-blond hair. Lord Devonport suggests briskly, in received pronunciation that distinguishes him from the surrounding moors, that we get cracking with a tour of his estate, Ray Demesne – 10,000 acres of moorland, field, forest and lake that border the desolate petrol station.

The reason for the meeting is none other than the Queen – specifically to hear about a 180ft celebratory monument to the monarch that Lord Devonport has recently received permission to erect on his land. Work will begin as soon as he raises the £5 million he needs to fund the structure. Not everyone is thrilled, though. The plan has been met with ire from local activists: a thousands-strong army of walkers, climbers and rural enthusiasts has mobilised online and objected to planning applications – its discontent splashed with glee across the newspapers.

Why such animosity? For some, the answer lies in the monument's proposed look, designed by sculptor Simon Hitchens. It's officially titled *Ascendant: The Elizabeth Landmark*, although Lord Devonport revels in one newspaper's description of the tall, sheath-like monument as 'the blade of glory' – 'I thought

## Long to tower over us, if plan wins approval

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THIS is the monument set to spring up in Northumberland in tribute to the Queen.

Artist Simon Hitchens's design for the 55m landmark has been chosen ahead of two others, following a consultation with the public.

The Elizabeth Landmark is set to be built in Ray Demesne state, between the A69 and A96 at Kirkwhelpington. At 55m high, it will be taller than Gateshead's Angel of the North.

Viscount Devonport has long aspired to have a tribute to the Queen on his estate. The decision to pick Mr Hitchens's design was one of the final steps in Lord Devonport's 25-year-long dream.

Lord Devonport, Terence Kearley said: "The quality of the



Viscount Devonport

three proposals was extremely high and it was very important to me to gather public feedback from the website and our exhibitions, which is why we extended our community consultations in July."

West Country-based Mr Hitchens's design – inspired by Queen Elizabeth II's reign – was the unanimous choice, beating com-

petition from North East-based Colin Rose and Peter I Evans.

But there is still plenty of work to go to make Lord Devonport's dream come true.

He said: "With a project of this size and scale, the pre-planning application process allows us to identify some of the specifics of the site and the construction. For example, through some detailed work we have carried out with Ordnance Survey, we have discovered that the optimum height for the landmark is 55m rather than the 60m we originally anticipated."

"With 55m being the precise height difference between the landmark site at Cold Law and the nearby Wanney Craggs, this will sit symbiotically within the landscape."

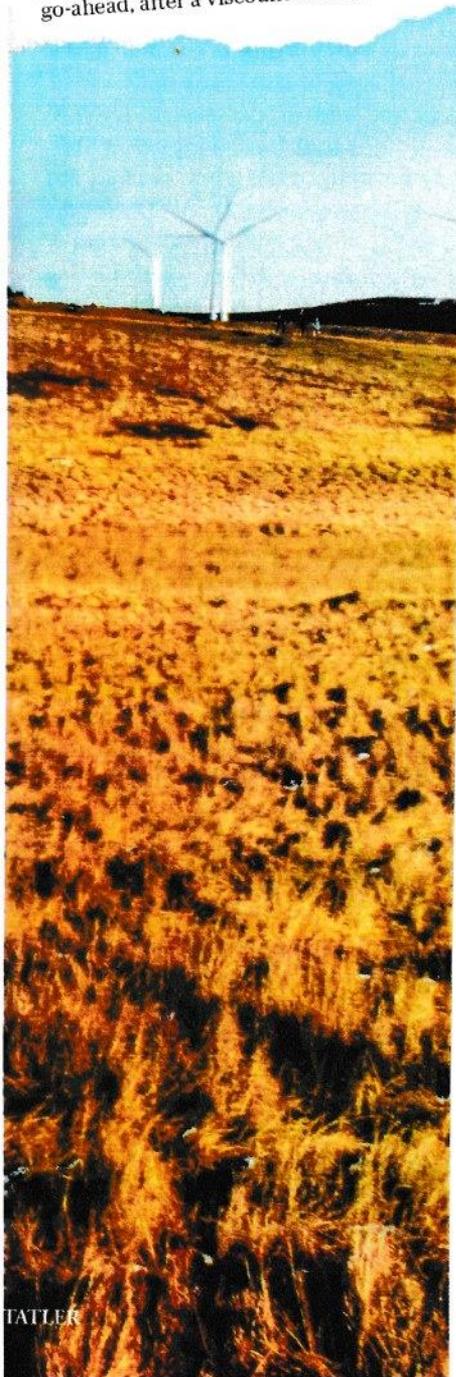
A fundraising campaign will attempt to raise the £2m needed, if planning permission is granted.

that was just wonderful,' he says. Others are less charitable. 'It's neither nowt nor summat. A toothpick mebbees,' said one Facebook user. 'Ye gods. Who in their right mind wants to see that?' said another. 'Lord La De Devonport,' decried a third.

Then there's the carbon footprint. In planning objections, the Keep the Wannies Wild (KTWW) activist group ('Wannies' referring to the local area) argued that *Ascendant* would turn a rural landscape industrial – and that the tons of steel proposed would have a negative environmental impact.

Lord Devonport, a proclaimed environmentalist, takes issue with that. For two hours, we trundle over cattle grids, bump over land troughs, and zoom from farm track to tarmac in the 4x4, as he speaks at length about arboriculture and topography. He talks of 'good countryside people'; why sheep are the best land managers; and of how, in the 1970s, at the highest point of the estate, a gust blew his car door off and it struck him that wind farms were the future. It is here, among the 16 turbines that transpired from his epiphany, that Lord Devonport confesses his love for the first time. Of the Queen, that is. 'The Commonwealth is one of her greatest achievements. Remarkable,' he says, moustache dancing in the breeze. 'She has been a continuous inspiration.'

The proposed site of the soon-to-ascend *Ascendant* is Cold Law summit. The Commonwealth will take central position on the monument, with its logo and 54 member states marked out. It will also ▷



◁ commemorate the Queen's birthday.

It's worth noting, as Lord Devonport does, that *Ascendant* will rise to the same height as the *Queen Victoria Cairn* (a small stone monument to its north created in 1897 to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee) and a local hill called Hepple Heugh. He gestures to each with his arms out, left and right – a faint whiff about him of the *Angel of the North*, the Antony Gormley sculpture that happens to be nearby. *Ascendant*



#### THE MONUMENT MEN

Viscount Devonport (left) commissioned sculptor Simon Hitchens (right) to design *Ascendant*

will be twice as high as the Gormley. 'On a clear day, you should be able to see it from 100 miles away,' he says, pointing towards the Lake District. 'The height is totally relevant. But it's not a competition.' It's clear he is gunning for the big leagues. And none are bigger than the Queen. They have met on several occasions, at charity galas: 'The first time, she had a very bad cold. But she's always gracious. She's interested in other people's individual details and she'll ask you questions.'

As titled families go, the Devonports are young. Lord Devonport's grandfather Hudson Kearley became the 1st Viscount Devonport in 1917. He founded the International Tea Company's Stores, was the first chairman of the Port of London Authority, and later served as minister of food control during the First World War. Lord Devonport was born to Gerald Kearley, 2nd Viscount Devonport, and Sheila Hope-Murray on 29 August 1944 at Peasmarsh Place in East Sussex, which he now runs as a residential care home. 'My mother wanted me to sell that property. I found a way of keeping it,' he says.

He inherited the family estates in 1965 at the age of 21. Ray Demesne, for all its size, doesn't have one grand house, but rather a constellation of farmhouses and homesteads, one of which he lives in. The estate used to belong to the Victorian engineer Charles Parsons, who made his fortune from the invention of the steam turbine – a source of pride for Lord Devonport. Parsons' son was killed in the

First World War, so his daughter Rachel inherited everything in 1931. 'She never set foot on the estate,' he says. 'She was put out for bad landlordism by the first Labour government in 1947. She didn't marry; instead she became a party girl and one of the richest lone females in England.' In 1956, she was bludgeoned to death in Newmarket by her stablehand.

In the 1950s, trustees of the 1st Viscount Devonport purchased the estate, which Lord Devonport inherited knowing little about land management. Then a young architecture student at Cambridge, he arrived at Ray Estate in an old, low-bottomed sports car during a flash flood. 'I came up the very rough road with 13 gates. I had to wait until it was virtually dark to make my way across.' It took him 35 years to get the estate into working order, he says, and he purchased two further farms to take the estate total to 10.

Now business is booming. In a world where the landed gentry is struggling to make ends meet, Lord Devonport has spun money from his inherited land. He leased his highest acres to the Swedish firm Vattenfall, which runs Ray Wind Farm. He farms much in-hand and also leases land to tenant farmers. Sweethope, another of his businesses, is renowned for fishing and holidays – and once *Ascendant* is up, he plans to add more accommodation. And then, in the south, there's the Tillingham Estate that comprises farm,

winery, restaurant and rooms – and has been described by the *South East Farmer* as 'east London members' club meets idyllic 14th-century Sussex farmstead'.

A Del Boy of the north, Lord Devonport wears on his pinky finger a golden signet ring bearing his family crest, a ship at its head. All at sea was how *Ascendant* seemed for a while: in 2019 Lord Devonport's planning application was rejected. In March 2021, an appeal was launched and permission finally

granted in November that year. It was far from the end of the matter. KTWW alleged that locals were not properly consulted; that the edifice's listed address was misleading; and that Lord Devonport has been throwing money at newspaper advertisements and 'aggressively' using social media to promote his cause. Relatives of Charles Parsons were quoted in the final appeal statement: 'We consider it highly unlikely that Uncle Charlie would view the proposed Elizabeth monument with anything other than dismay and horror.'

Over lunch at Lord Devonport's home (boxed sandwiches served on Millennium napkins printed with '2000' in silver lettering, and coffee in a mug bearing an image of his 'blade of glory'; Jaffa cakes and crisps for afters), an oil on canvas of a youthful Lord Devonport gazes from the wall behind the real viscount's head. 'The comments made by the inspector deal with the matters that were of concern,' he says crisply when I ask for his take on the criticism of his planning application. I press him further: But did it make you feel a certain way? 'The inspector tells the story. It's all there.' He takes a bite of his sandwich.

It got personal when KTWW invoked Her Majesty. 'Not in our Queen's name,' read its yellow banners unveiled on Facebook. One member addressed a letter to Devonport reading: 'We consider that HM The Queen would not wish to see this being erected in her honour. We say

that because she has made it very clear that she wishes her forthcoming jubilee to be remembered by a canopy of trees – The Queen's Green Canopy, I'm sure you've heard of it... We believe that the construction of *Ascendant* would be hugely environmentally damaging, requiring many tons of steel and concrete. We are sure you have read about the carbon footprint of these things and would not wish Her Majesty, or yourself, to be associated with their use in such a sensitive and remote place.' No reply. Though group members rallied in the comments: 'Immense Anne. You nailed it,' said one.

But Lord Devonport is passionate about trees. He planted a forest on his estate – the Prince William Plantation – in 1982, the year the monarch-to-be was born. Indeed, 15 per cent of his estate is forestry. He is resolute that within a few years *Ascendant* will 'more than counter any negative carbon of steel'. The inspector, it seems, agrees. But KTW appears ill-contented. Rumour has it the group is readying a new petition; but if Lord Devonport gets his way, his 'blade of glory' will be 'robust and long-lasting', he says.

A fellow lunch guest chimes in: 'Terence has financed the whole thing up until this point. Substantial expenditure.' And so Lord Devonport is in deep, trying to find private funding. A Canadian wrote him a six-figure cheque the other week; he's been in Dubai, courting old school contemporaries; and development companies, he says, are considering working in kind. He will need all the help he can get; *Ascendant* is going to cost around £4 million more than originally reported.

And the Palace? 'We've had correspondence with the Palace, but I'm not allowed to say what,' Lord Devonport giggles, through bites of his sandwich. Baroness Scotland, he says, is supportive. He has high hopes for the future head of the Commonwealth, Prince Charles. 'He's received the report with great interest. A lot of his things to do with nature and sustainability were ignored for years. Thank God the world has woken up to the fact that actually he was ahead of his day. I think [Charles becoming head of the Commonwealth] should be good news.'

But, for Lord Devonport, no one can beat Queen Elizabeth II: 'There's promise of good things beyond, but it will never be the same.' □

## TREE'S A CROWD

Planting mighty oaks, elms and sweet chestnut saplings, the smart set are doing their spadework for The Queen's Green Canopy to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee



### *The Marquess of Abergavenny*

The sun came out for Lord Abergavenny when he planted elm trees to honour the Queen in front of an audience of 50 guests, including locals, who gathered in the grounds of his East Sussex estate, Eridge Park, the oldest enclosed deer park in England. Tory MP Nus Ghani planted two elms and declared it a 'wonderful concept'.



### *The Earl of Derby*

A suited-and-booted Teddy Derby headed out to the GreenAcres Rainford park within the Knowsley Estate to plant a tree at a woodland burial site in December last year. 'Her Majesty has been like a magnificent oak tree – solid, dependable, always there acting with integrity,' he said at the planting ceremony.



### *James and Lady Emma Barnard*

The chatelaine of Parham House in West Sussex was at the helm of a spade and a pitchfork when she planted an elm tree on the estate. The head gardener soon took over, planting 17 more elms in an avenue. 'If ever there is a Queen Elizabeth III, we hope her subjects will be able to enjoy them,' says Lady Emma.



### *Lord and Lady Egremont*

The Egremonts went one step further with their jubilee tribute on the Leconfield Estate in Petworth. Among the oak, crab apple, cherry and shrubs planted was a sweet chestnut sapling tree – the seed of which came from a historic tree in Belgium on the site of the Battle of Waterloo, in which Lord Egremont's ancestors fought.



### *The Marquess of Aberdeen and Temair*

It was always going to be oak for the 8th Marquess of Aberdeen and Temair, who chose the tree for its symbol of longevity. George and his mother, Joanna, planted the tree in the gardens of Haddo House, the family's Palladian manor in the Scottish village of Tarves in Aberdeenshire.