

reprinted from the *Brindlecliffe ECHO!* December 2019

## **The 'Torc of Norfolk' – North-West Norfolk Borough Council expects to approve plans**

Proposals for a ten-metre high sculpture on the west side of the A149 road near Canidringham will be discussed at January's meeting of the North-West Norfolk Borough Council. Although the Highways Department expressed reservations about the possibility of distracting drivers, by moving the proposed location slightly closer to the road then these concerns have been alleviated.

The sculpture, called the 'Torc of Norfolk', was designed by Tony Gumley. According to information provided by the Queen Alexandra Arts Centre, on Station Street in Eaton St Torpid – known to all simply as 'The Alex' – Gumley's design was inspired by the Iron Age gold torcs discovered at Canidringham and Whittlecreek. 'Although I have not made any attempt to mimic the decoration on the original torcs,' stated Gumley, 'my design creates a modern version of the iconic shapes.'

The Curator of The Alex, Ms Cynthia Smythe-Smith FRSA, has for several years sought to commission a dramatic sculpture to enliven the Coast Road, formally known only as the A149. 'Everyone travelling to the towns and beaches along the Norfolk coast almost inevitably uses this stretch of road', said Smythe-Smith. 'Yet for several miles to the west of Canidringham it is just a very boring vista of trees. A suitably dramatic sculpture would transform this road into a "gateway" to north-west Norfolk. It would give an identity to the area in the same way "The Angel of the North" has become inseparably linked with the Tyne and Wear district.'

Tony Gumley's temporary installation of 'Three Buxom Ladies' on the beach at Holme Pier Point in 2018 brought considerable acclaim, reported Smythe-Smith who continued by explaining that 'When Lucia Anderson took up the one-year post of Curatorial Trainee at The Alex in the spring of 2019 she immediately took an interest in the Iron Age treasure discovered in the area and now on display in the British Museum.' Anderson approached a number of local artists to produce work inspired by the torcs for an exhibition to be called 'Bling BC'. Tony Gumley responded almost immediately with a maquette, or small-scale model, of the 'Torc of Norfolk'. Smythe-Smith recognised that, if scaled up sufficiently, this would make an excellent 'gateway sculpture' for the Coast Road. A site on the western side of the road was

identified where Ken Wood, where the hoards were discovered, would be clearly visible in the background. Indeed, the sculpture could be aligned so the wood appeared to be in the centre of the torc when seen from the road.

Preliminary discussions with the landowner and the planning department of the borough council identified a number of concerns, but all these could be resolved once funding was available. The Chief Executive of North-West Norfolk Borough Council, Cllr Abbie Dore, made Smythe-Smith aware of an anonymous local benefactor who would be willing to fund the sculpture as a memorial to his recently-deceased wife, who had been an enthusiastic amateur archaeologist in this area.

Cllr Dore said 'This planning application is one of the most exciting and transformatory proposals the Borough Council have been asked to consider. While I am aware that a minority of councillors have expressed reservations about spending money on something which does not obviously benefit the local community, at the end of the day this is a proposal which is not being funded by the Council. Many other councillors have already realised the unquantifiable benefits that such a dramatic statement will bring to this part of Norfolk. I am incredibly impressed that the sculptor, Mr Gumley, has been able to create such a dramatic and contemporary work of art while clearly referencing the archaeological treasures which made the vicinity famous. I would also like to express my appreciation to Cynthia Smythe-Smith and her assistant, Lucia Anderson, for all their effort in commissioning and progressing this proposal. When this planning application is considered by the next full meeting of the North-West Norfolk Borough Council in January I very much hope that it will be approved.'

Gumley said that the steel sculpture is intended to be six metres high but will stand on a concrete base itself four metres high. The total height will be ten metres, which is half the height of the "Angel of the North". But, stated Gunley, 'as the "Torc of Norfolk" will be closer to the road than the "Angel" is to the A1, then it will seem to be of a similar size.'

According to Gumley 'The steel torc is estimated to require about six tonnes of so-called 'weathering steel'. This is a special alloy, often called "Corten", containing small amounts of copper and chromium. Under normal British weathering conditions, the surface corrodes to a stable patina which does not easily rub off. Initially the

corrosion forms a ferrous oxide, which looks like rust, but over a couple of years or so this steadily changes to a ferric oxide, which is a darker shade of grey-brown.'

The design of the concrete base is in the form of two truncated pyramids, with the bottom pyramid inverted thereby creating an overhang which will make it difficult for people to attempt to climb the structure. From thirty minutes after sunset until midnight the sculpture will be spot-lit with monochromatic yellow LED lights, transforming the appearance of the steel into something resembling gold. A lay-by will be created on the western side of the A149 close to the sculpture to enable visitors to park within easy walking distance.

Tony Gumley has prepared artistic impressions of how the sculpture will look in daylight and after dark.