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Place-shaping and Economic Growth
Harrogate Borough Council
P.O Box 787
Harrogate HG1 9RW

15 July 2021

Dear Sirs

Erection of three sculptures on the following sites: 1. Ripon Market Place - a 5m high bronze outline form of St Wilfrid and monk to include paving, benches, information plaque and lighting. 2. Minster Road, opposite the West End of the Cathedral - a 1.3m high bronze representation of a medieval boat with monks, on stone plinth, to include new paving, benches, information plaque and lighting. 3. Roundabout between A61 Ripon bypass and B6265 Boroughbridge Road - a 5m high cast resin sculptural montage of the ancient buildings of Rome, to include information plaque and lighting.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this application.

Ripon Civic Society is aware of the importance of this application for the 1350 years celebration of S. Wilfrid which falls on 2022. Ideally the principal city organisations will be able to come together around such an event. The principle of including public art within the public realm is to be welcomed. However, as regards these significant proposals for public art for which planning permission is now being sought, with regret, Ripon Civic Society is unable to offer support for reasons which shall be explained. Accordingly, we urge the withdrawal of this application.

We do not wish to engage in the proposed concept of each art work; the use of an abstract or representational approach is for the artist and client. What we can comment upon is the appropriateness of the proposed designs in its location.

The Design Statement and Project Plan and the Heritage Statement draw support from the made Ripon Neighbourhood Plan, notably Policy H2 - Public Art
'The provision of Public Art, or financial contributions towards its provision, will be supported.' The justification for which states:

> Given Ripon's attractive architectural heritage it is surprising that there is little in the way of art installations within the street scene and open spaces. The Market Place obelisk is an obvious exception and the statue to the First Marquess of Ripon in Spa Gardens is also significant owing to the subject's family's contributions to the city and the Studley Royal estate. There is opportunity for provision of creative and innovative public art and this was recognised as an outcome from early public consultation.

This important policy establishes a principle of support yet it does not justify the location, concept and content of any one public artwork or support the particular circumstances of its proposed location. It is on this understanding that our reticence lies.

We should comment first on the letters of support included in the Design Statement and Project Plan.

In the letter of 21st February 2021, we note that Harrogate Borough Council 'is happy to offer our broad support to the project, recognising that the installations align with the adopted City Development Plan'. Assuming that this is a reference to the neighbourhood plan, such recognition is

incorrect. The neighbourhood plan does not offer specific support for these artworks. They do not as such ‘align with’ the plan.

The Heritage Statement refers to a pre-application enquiry response received from Harrogate Borough Council on 30th April 2021. We can agree with the assessment especially as it draws attention to protection of the various heritage assets.

A further comment on background consultation is that whilst the Ripon Civic Society executive committee considered the project, this was not by way of a presentation apparently as provided to others, no conclusion was arrived at owing to various concerns, nor was this position circulated to the project partnership. With all respect, the letter of support from Ripon Together in the Design Statement and Project Plan that the project ‘has been well received and positively supported’ does not represent a view of Ripon Civic Society as not only had none been communicated nor any conclusion reached at that time.

We note references to Nikolaus Pevsner’s observations in the Buildings of England: Yorkshire (West Riding). The quoted comment in the Heritage Statement from Pevsner that “Ripon is not specially interesting architecturally” is from an old edition and not repeated in the latest. Then, ‘Pevsner states that [apart from the Town Hall] there are “no houses of interest in the square ..... except for the Wakeman’s House”.’ We do not accept that Pevsner should be held as a pre-eminent commentator on the city. It is our opinion that the Market Place remains a vibrant ‘meeting place of choice” and its architecture, be it mediaeval, Georgian, Victorian (or indeed more recent) continues to provide one of the most striking townscapes of English market towns.

We note the Heritage Statement comment (2A) that:
‘The Market Place is a fine example of a Yorkshire market square. It contains a number of listed buildings, structures and assets in fairly close proximity to the site of the proposed sculpture. The pleasing ambiance of the square is the product of the collection of buildings forming the square rather than the quality of the individual buildings.’
Given this, the introductory comment (1) that ‘With the exception of the cathedral, Ripon is deficient in notable art and architecture’ is unjustified and unwelcome.

The importance of these observations is to direct our comments to include the townscape implications of the proposals in their locations, the Conservation Area and the setting of listed buildings.

Overall, there is no linking design approach and story telling between the artworks, any visual link, nor any association with the selected location (except perhaps opposite the cathedral west front). Each artwork is a singular piece which it appears could be located anywhere. The apparent lack of public consultation does question the inclusivity of each artwork in subject matter, design and location.

We take no pleasure in drawing attention to anti-social behaviour. We are firm believers in the power of art to raise the spirits. However, each design is vulnerable to abuse, especially on the Market Place.

The Market Place proposal 1 is unsound. We fail to see how it is able to signal the respective locations of Market Place and Cathedral and a route between them. It is at a point on the Market Place with substantial items of existing street furniture, and is likely to hinder their operational effectiveness. The design of the artwork is an open invitation to abuse leaving little encouragement to the imagination.The height has an adverse effect on adjacent listed buildings including close proximity to the Cabmen’s Shelter. The intervention in existing paving is incongruous, introducing un-coordinated materials and forms affecting the setting of the Town Hall and the integrity of the Market Place.

The Kirkgate proposal 2 is curious in that whilst readily interpreted, it is uncomfortable in scale being both small yet a potential distraction, so long as the public realm is disrupted by Minster Road and has no comprehensive and coordinated design. We are tempted to suggest that it would be better sited between Minster Road and the Cathedral west front but that is to fall into the trap of engaging with what is at this moment an ad hoc proposal.

Both Market Place and Kirkgate artworks should be reviewed in the light of the Ripon Renewal project city centre masterplan which needs to establish a coordinated and comprehensive approach for public art, location, design and integration with existing heritage assets, street furniture and ground

surfaces. The masterplanning and design skills of the consultants team is a resource that should be embraced.

We argue that siting of the artwork 3 on the A61 roundabout is a visual distraction, a temptation for vandalism and is isolated from safe scrutiny by pedestrian viewers. It is not for us to comment on road safety but urge you to obtain the considered advice of the Highway Authority.

As regards the generalities, it is not clear who is the legal owner of each artwork nor where responsibility for maintenance, be it deterioration, cleaning, repair or unforeseen and wilful damage, will lie. In the ultimate, is there a commitment to replacement of an artwork? Any thought that planning permission should be granted must ensure that these fundamental concerns have been resolved.

We are somewhat surprised that a single planning application can include three separate locations. Whilst this approach may expedite consideration of the individual proposals, we might think that a condition requiring the commitment of funds to the completion of all artworks before the installation of any one should be required. Given our concerns for each artwork, perhaps not.

Ripon Civic Society supports public art for the city with enthusiasm yet recognises that the design process is complicated and requires engagement and reflection. We are clear that this application does not demonstrate that it has met such tests.

Yours faithfully

Christopher Hughes

Chair, Ripon Civic Society