Mark Jenkinson MP

House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Workington Town Council
Oxford Street
Workington
CA14 2RS

30th April 2021

Dear Councillors,

I am writing to express my concerns over town council plans for the Duffield Beacon in Vulcan Park. I accept that there are health and safety concerns around the lighting of the beacon given its proximity to the hospital.

However, I cannot agree with the proposal to reduce the height of the steel beam to three metres or to separate the basket from the column. What has been proposed constitutes a wanton act of vandalism. The monument should be moved in its entirety to a more suitable location, whether elsewhere in this spacious park, or to the Slag Banks as suggested. I am also fully supportive of the proposal to erect a VE/VJ Day Memorial Statue, possibly of a solider with his head bowed towards the cenotaph as a sign of respect. This is an excellent idea. However, this should be kept separate from the plans for the Duffield Beacon.

Having weighed the argument up from both sides, I feel that the most sensible solution would be to restore the existing Duffield Beacon – it appears to need some work – intact. The beacon should be moved to a safe and prominent location where it can be seen by everyone. Given the size of Vulcan Park, I see no reason why two such memorials (the beacon and the VE/VJ Statue) cannot be accommodated within its curtilage. Surely, it makes sense to site them both in the park which is owned by the town council.

I am happy to write in support of any funding applications made by the town council to support either the erection of a VE/VJ Day Statue or to conserve and move the Duffield Beacon. Under no circumstances should the Duffield Beacon be cut up and the column used for another monument simply because this is the cheapest option. This public monument was a gift to the people of the town from British Steel. The column is made from railway tracks made locally which have a heritage value in themselves. And as you know, this landmark was the created with help from British Steel apprentices and was intended to be a permanent fixture in the park.

The Duffield Beacon was erected in the early 1990s and was lit on New Year's Eve 1993 to mark Britain's entry into the single European market (since, then it has been lit several times to mark significant civic events including the Queen's 90th birthday). You will not find a stauncher Brexiteer than me. However, we should not be rewriting history whether we saw it as a mistake to enter the EU or a mistake to leave. Certainly, no one has the right to destroy a public monument erected by those who felt that entering the single market was a cause for celebration.

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Whatever your feelings on the EU, this remains part of our shared heritage. The Duffield Beacon is also a monument to our steelworks industry. The monument, including the basket, represents a single work. Any division into its constituent parts – unless this is temporary and necessary for the purposes of restoration – violates the integrity of the beacon. I am particularly horrified by proposal to reduce the height of the column itself.

This is a piece of the fabric of our industrial heritage and, while not formally listed, nevertheless merits our protection. It was famously said of rails forged in Workington, of which the beacon itself is constructed, that they "held the world together". What message does it send out if we can't even keep our public monuments in one piece? The plans, in their present form, are an insult to our history, to former steelworkers, to British Steel and to the apprentices who built this monument.

Yours sincerely

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