Submission from G N Crowley to the Wickham Market PC meeting 12/4/21. Re. Village Sign.

'Insult to Injury'

I write this not only as a resident of Wickham Market but as Professor of Painting at the pre-eminent Royal College of Art and a practicing painter of some distinction\* who can lay claim to a wide experience of public art and site specific projects, the majority of which involved elements of engineering in their fabrication; eg. Brompton Hospital, London; Chandlers Ford Public Library, Hampshire and Dorset County Hospital, Dorchester amongst many others.

My first encounter with the village sign project was a brief conversation last year with Cllr Horsnall. I asked him what the budget was. He appeared suspicious of my inquiry and told me that he couldn't share that information with me. I was perplexed. Why the hostility? Why the contempt? I subsequently learnt that the original budget was £1.5K; a totally unrealistic figure. Which had anyone with any experience of such schemes been consulted at the outset, they would have immediately recognised the budget was absurdly inadequate. It's at this point that the project should have been abandoned or re-envisioned as an opportunity to involve the village in the project.

See my (attached) Strategy Document which the E&L committee not only rejected out of hand but wilfully misconstrued as a design proposal. My strategy was referred to by the E&L as the contribution of 'a kind resident' – a turn of phrase designed to delegitimise my contribution by referring to me as some random individual rather than an experienced and widely respected painter and educator.

During my second conversation with Cllr Horsnall I told him in that the sign was a cultural and visual embarrassment and to repair it would be adding 'insult to injury'. I also left him in no doubt that the structure was also top heavy and intrinsically unsound. He didn't understand a word I was saying. He was either unable or unwilling to engage. Either way, he was out of his depth. It was clear that he'd made up his mind to repair this ghastly thing – no matter what anyone said – and at any cost. I later discovered that almost £4K had been spent to remove the existing post; £1200 for the crane and £2700 for Brooks & Wood - a company of civil engineers – to undertake the ground works, instead of employing a local builder and fabricator.

I've been involved in numerous public art projects and the Nolan Principles are categorical about the process of awarding projects of this nature. No member of a committee that is awarding such a project may award it to themselves – even if they act voluntarily and without remuneration. This represents a flagrant conflict of interests – leading to a patent lack of accountability.

One final observation; the childish and utterly incompetent drawing that is being half heartedly circulated is structurally unsound. It'll fall apart in no time. The person (or persons) responsible not only lack any knowledge of public art, but any understanding of metal fabrication and current architectural metal coatings and finishes.

I write this in sadness rather than anger. Sadness at a wonderful opportunity lost. The opportunity to give the young people of Wickham Market a sense of participation. A lost opportunity to gain the village some positive publicity. And sadness at the lack of vision, the nonexistent consultation and contempt demonstrated for community values - not to mention the flagrant fiscal mismanagement.

We're constantly being told that there's no money for potentially life enhancing – if not life saving projects – like the much needed traffic calming scheme. Instead well in excess of £10K. Is being squandered on an ill conceived and poorly executed vanity project which of itself would be thoroughly problematic - even if the scheme and subsequent design were of an acceptable standard – which they are not. Undeterred the E&L committee are now thinking of employing a wood carver – their idiocy seems to be boundless. If they continue in this way, the eventual cost to be in excess of £15K. This appalling project is a travesty and a betrayal of the community at a time when some kind of 'societal healing' is needed. The Parish Council should call a halt to this madness – immediately. Whatever happened to competence, accountability, fiscal prudence and inclusion?

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\*See grahamcrowley.co.uk and A & C Black's 'Who's Who'.