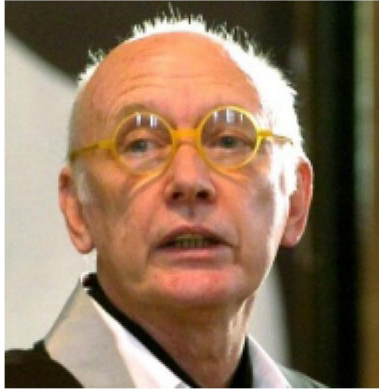


'Heartening to see Wigton fight memorial move' says top artist

By Sarah Newstead

A leading light in the Cumbrian art world has praised Wigton's "civic pride" in the face of a suggestion to move the town's historic memorial fountain.



Conrad Atkinson, who lives near Burgh by Sands, is the latest figure to speak out over a Cumbria Highways idea to move the 139-year-old George Moore fountain to allow for road improvements.

Mr Atkinson, who has been described as the world's leading socio-political artist and has work on display in London's Tate Museum, said: "It is heartening to see the reaction of the citizens of Wigton to the proposed vandalism against their monument.

"I've always admired the civic pride of Wigton. Its inspiring refurbishment of the monument; its shopkeepers showing local art in their windows every year; Melvyn Bragg, in the spirit of the Moores, commissioning stained-glass windows for the church."

His comments come after The Cumberland News revealed last month that Cumbria County Council officers have considered moving the fountain.

Ideas from Cumbria Highways include moving it a few yards to improve traffic flow at the junction of High Street and King Street, or uprooting it completely to a nearby car park.

The suggestions came after Tesco was last year granted permission to build a 30,000sq ft superstore on the site of Hopes Auction Mart.

Work to the roads would use money from the retail giant earmarked for infrastructure and improvement works in the town, known as section 106. However, local people fiercely opposed the idea of moving the Grade II-listed monument built by George Moore of Mealsgate in memory of his wife, Eliza.

They set up a group on social networking site Facebook which attracted 500 members. The group has since been removed.

Town councillors also said they would oppose the idea, should a firm plan emerge.

Lord Melvyn Bragg and descendants of George Moore are among the other people who have voiced their opposition.

Mr Atkinson said: "Wigton has a sense of place and civic identity that could well be copied by other towns and cities."

He added that he hoped section 106 cash would be used to pay for a purpose-built artist's studio in the town for an artist in residence.

"It could, from time to time, be used as a gallery for local artists and the artist in residence could teach local people to paint and draw."

Mr Atkinson said such a studio could boost tourist attractions outside of the Lake District.

The Cleator Moor-born artist has exhibited at many of the world's most prestigious galleries.

As well as in the Tate, his works are in the permanent collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum, the Australian National Gallery, the Pushkin Museum, Moscow, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.