

23 Jan 2013

Ms Sue Jackson  
Principal Planning Officer  
Colchester Borough Council  
Rowan House, 33 Sheepen Road, Colchester, CO3 3WG

Stour Valley Visitor Centre at Horkesley Park Application No. 120965

The Chantry Fine Art Gallery

Dear Ms Jackson,

As a professional artist recently moved to the region I am appalled that planning officers seem poised to accept that the provision of a "few" John Constable paintings could be the subject of a planning provision cloaked in secrecy. I consider it extremely unlikely that a significant presentation of his works is achievable, and in any event it would be regionally meaningless given that the most important collection of his works outside of London is freely available at Christchurch Mansion's Wolsey Art Gallery just a few miles away.

The art market for John Constable paintings is highly specialised and requires a high degree of scholarship. His formidable output gave rise to a vast range of works including studies, sketches, and full-sized oil sketches through to highly finished final works. The range is unusual because his continuing extensive influence on contemporary painting has created a market that can sometimes classify his sketches as superior to the final highly finished versions, thereby pushing up prices. The market is further complicated by works which are "attributed" to him, "after" him, "in the manner" of him, etc.

In view of the BMA supplementary report and its reference to Horkesley Park's Constable Country offer being the least well defined key driver to regional status, it is imperative that the impending officer report is professionally advised when considering the feasibility of the applicant "obtaining a few Constable paintings" To avoid potential embarrassment, the council would be advised to commission expert art consultants to test and ensure the feasibility of this provision.

Paintings by an artist of John Constable's stature, are in constant, world wide demand because they so rarely come to the market. His tendency to make numerous oil sketches in preparation for a finished work is one of the reasons for this continuing demand. Today the oil sketches are highly regarded as great works in their own right and in some cases are even considered superior to the more highly finished version. This is a contemporary phenomenon. For example, The Leaping Horse final version of 1825 is heavily handled with figure and horse looking far too stiff to today's painters, compared with The Leaping Horse full-size sketch of 1824 where the figure and horse are largely made up of arbitrary, almost abstract marks. Francis Bacon, probably Britain's most important contemporary artist was influenced by the bravura paint handling of this sketch which he would have seen at the Victoria & Albert Museum.

In the mid 1980's, Maggie Hambling, Suffolk's most famous contemporary daughter turned to landscape painting. She depicted scenes from her native Suffolk, where her studies of dawn in the Orwell Estuary recall the luminous visions of 19<sup>th</sup> Century English masters JMW Turner and John Constable.

Constable's genius was to paint non-illustrational images without ever being completely abstract. His full-size sketches could be called an "abstract realism" and have all the freedom of both "action painting" and "abstract expressionism". This ensures his continuing relevance to contemporary art,

It is this continuing relevance which reinforces his worldwide status and makes Constable owners reluctant to part with their treasures.

The recent sale of Constable's The Lock achieving £22.4 million testifies to the buoyancy of the market for his work. Even tiny works can command high figures. The Traveller, just 11.25 x 13 inches which was sold some time ago by Richard Nathanson Impressionist & 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art, would probably achieve £200,000 on today's market.

A recent artnet search for Minor Constables for sale revealed the following:-

0 Artworks / 0 artnet Auctions / 0 Galleries or Auction Houses / 0 Calendar Events / 0 Artists or Manufacturers.

**The question is, where on earth will the necessary "few" Constable paintings come from?**

To allow a cloak of secrecy to shroud the supposed proposed provision of works created by Constable, a worldwide, openly acknowledged and revered genius, is a gross insult to his achievement.

Colchester Borough Council planning officers lending themselves to this misguided, provincial, proposal for the proposed Chantry Fine Art Gallery, which lacking genuine scholarship, shamelessly exploit's Constable's reputation for reasons of commerce rather than culture will render a grave injustice, not just to Constable, but to the whole cultural integrity of the region.

It is imperative that the impending Officers Report reflects the broadest possible appreciation of our international treasure. It is preposterous and grossly insulting to make the acquisition of Constable paintings the subject of a development planning condition cloaked in secrecy.

Yours sincerely

Peter Gaskin