

REDACTED SECTION

IT'S UTTERLY BUTTERLY INSPIRED

EAST ANGLIA IS IN THE UNEDIFYING GRIP OF "REGION ENVY" WITH GRANDIOSE PLANS FOR THE LANDSCAPE. BUT ONE SCHEME HAS A TOUCH OF GENIUS



THEY CONFESS THAT LOCAL REACTION HAS BEEN QUITE CRITICAL

to the downright earthy: a "renewable energy" power station running on human waste. A local school even came up with a design for a "Leaning Tower of Luton".

Eventually the judges whittled these potential landmarks down to four, which will now undergo £250,000 worth of "feasibility studies". One is a "tropical reef" off the Norfolk coast which would create a new Norfolk broad, an all-year diving centre, and a watersports resort called (with unarguable logic) East Reef. The second is a movable bridge that would span waterways and provide a platform for local events. The third is also a bridge: a "Bridge of Reeds" over the A14 to link Cambridge with the Wicken Fen Nature Reserve.

And the fourth is, in my view, the most imaginative of all: those steel sculptures at Dunwich. They are the brainwave of Anne Niemann and Johannes Ingrisch: German whizzkid architects only two years out of university. But nobody can accuse them of not knowing their English history.

Today, Dunwich is a tiny hamlet. Go back 750 years, however, and it was the mighty port boasting 60 merchant ships, 11 warships, and at least six churches.

Then came three great storms, in 1287,

1328 and 1342. The first damaged the sea walls. The second, an epic hurricane, silted up the harbour mouth — an economic disaster. But the third was the worst. The sea overwhelmed Dunwich's defences and smashed 400 houses and two churches. That catastrophe was also a portent, for over the next six centuries Dunwich's other churches would also disappear under the sea, as well as all its medieval streets.

And the sea continues to devour that part of the coast. The first time I came to Dunwich, in the 1970s, one could still thrill to the sight of bones from the last remain-

ing churchyard, All Saints, sticking out of what, by then, was the sea cliff. But even that macabre sight has now gone. "Dunwich is the Atlantis of the east," says the man at the EEDA. A touch melodramatic, perhaps, but one knows what he means. Visit the place on a stormy night, and you can easily picture the savage waves sweeping away those flimsy 14th-century houses and their wretched inhabitants. Indeed, some extra-sensorily perceptive souls claim that they can still hear the screams, and the desperate tolling from the six ghostly towers (ah, the bells, the bells!).

It is those six church towers that Niemann and Ingrisch want to recreate, to the precise height, and in the exact locations, of the originals — though, as they cheerily admit, they currently have only the vaguest notion of where those might be. That is not their only problem. Initial reaction to the plan among locals has been, they confess, "quite critical", and not only for aesthetic reasons. If this landmark became even half as popular as the *Angel of the North* the lane to the seashore would be overwhelmed with traffic.

I understand these objections. And perhaps, in the end, this eccentric scheme will indeed be ruled impractical. But I hope not. Something about it is touched with genius. It wouldn't just be a highly original way of marking an important medieval site. It would also stand as an ecological warning. Despite everything that nature has inflicted on vulnerable coastal or riverside towns — from Dunwich in the 13th century to Boscastle last month — we still arrogantly build new homes close to eroding coastlines, or slap in the middle of floodplains. And then, like Canute's sycophants, we imagine that we can hold the wind or tide at bay. But we couldn't in 1342, and we can't today. Those gaunt steel tubes, emerging from the grey waves of the North Sea, might serve as a stark reminder of what happens to those who try.

On the other hand, the "Leaning Tower of Luton" also has a certain ring to it.

IT SOUNDS mad, and it is. Utterly, butterfly-harmy. In the sea off Dunwich, Suffolk, a set of futuristic steel sculptures will rise high above the waves. That's them at the foot of the page, by the way, as imagined by a clearly very excited computer. And if you think they look like medieval churches reinterpreted by groovy 21st-century designers, you would be uncannily correct. That is exactly what they are. And one day they may be built. But not, I suspect, before the massed bourgeoisie of Suffolk has had something to say about the matter.

Surreal sculptures in the North Sea? What's going on? The answer is "region envy". The East of England Development Agency has been looking covetously at such tourist-thrilling additions to the British landscape as Tim Smit's Eden Project in Cornwall, Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North* outside Gateshead, and the London Eye. And it has decided that East Anglia, too, must have an iconic "landmark", something to give this sprawling region (from Luton in the golden west to Lowestoft in the exotic east) a "sense of identity".

So it held an international competition. And boy, did the ideas flood in — 234 of them. They ranged from the whimsical — a "symbolic train of sand" in Harwich —