

Meeting with Andrew George MP and supporters of the Isles of Scilly to Penzance Ferry Link application: Wednesday 15th December 2010, Committee Room 9, House of Commons

1. Present:
 - Andrew George MP (The West Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Constituency of St Ives, Liberal Democrat)
 - Nicola Yeates – Council Officer, Cornwall Council
 - Philip Hygate - Chief Executive, Council of the Isles of Scilly
 - Cllr Maria Bennett - Vice Chair, Council of the Isles of Scilly
 - Cllr Mike Hicks – Council of the Isles of Scilly
 - Cllr Graeme Hicks – Cornwall Council Transport Portfolio Holder
 - Mike Waters – Chairman, Penzance Chamber of Commerce
2. Andrew George MP set the scene for the Minister on the current situation with the application for the Isles of Scilly to Penzance Ferry Link scheme, and introduced the attendees at the meeting.
3. Isles of Scilly Council explained their position that this application was an appropriate, cost effective and sustainable solution for the island, and that it had gone too far down the track now to be changed at this late stage.
4. They added that the quays were not currently fit for purpose, and that serious safety problems were being experienced, such as overtopping and the chaotic disembarkation.
5. It was felt that the scheme had already been refined and descoped, and the cost was already reduced from the original. No more reductions were seen to be possible.
6. The group highlighted that the timing was imperative, and that a decision was required at the earliest opportunity to secure the £11m match funding contribution from European Union Convergence funds. There were also tenders that would expire, potentially causing further delay and increased costs, if a decision to approve the current scheme was not made quickly.
7. Norman Baker responded by saying that he took the matter very seriously, and that he understood that the ferry link is vital for the islands. There must be a suitable service in place, and accepted that the present situation is not satisfactory.
8. However, he confirmed that he did wish the promoters to look again at the costs. All other local authority projects were under intense challenge on costs and in the current climate it could not be taken as a given that a previously assumed level of funding could be provided without serious scrutiny and justification. The level of funding in question here was significant, and it was important that what was proposed should not be a gold-plated solution.
9. IoS Council strongly refuted that the proposed scheme was gold-plated, feeling that it was the bare minimum of what was required.
10. The group discussed the vessel options, and NB queried strongly why it was not felt possible to source a second hand vessel (for either passenger or

freight). The promoters felt that this would not be possible due to the very specific situation for the route. For example, the vessel would need to have a low draft, because of the unusually shallow waters at Penzance, but long and wide enough to be stable in such rough conditions.

11. NB asked if Cornwall Council could continue to fund the harbour improvement works with a different vessel solution. The supporting parties stated that this wouldn't be a suitable solution.
12. Cornwall Council added that they could not continue to keep the funding offer open indefinitely. The Council were essentially being a 'good neighbour'. Although this was not technically Cornwall's problem, they were prepared to help, but if the window of funding was lost, it was likely to be too late. The portfolio holder felt that he could not recommend to his fellow members any more investment of the Council's time and money if the current proposal was not accepted.
13. Other contributing factors to the urgency were the MCA licensing of the vessel, which was due for renewal in the near future. The safety standards of the current vessel fell short of those required for the preferred licence.
14. The meeting concluded with the Minister requesting that further information be provided, and for further investigations to be made into alternative options for a vessel and lower cost options for the harbour.

Action: Officials would liaise with the relevant parties and report back to the Minister.

PS to Norman Baker MP

Meeting with Andrew George MP and supporters of the alternative scheme for the Isles of Scilly to Penzance Ferry Link: Wednesday 15th December 2010, Committee Room 9, House of Commons

1. Present:
 - Andrew George MP (The West Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Constituency of St Ives, Liberal Democrat)
 - Cllr Jan Ruhmund – Mayor, Penzance Town Council
 - Simon Glasson – Clerk, Penzance Town Council
 - Paul Newport - Chair, Penzance Business Network
 - Hadrian Piggott – Vice Chair, Penzance Business Network
 - Charlie Cartwright – Shipping Consultant, Trythall Shipping
 - John Maggs – Friends of Penzance Harbour
 - Keith Bell - LOCi-ATA architects
2. Cllr Jan Ruhmund confirmed that while Penzance Town Council (PTC) fully supported the necessity for ferry link, they were opposed to the specific option for works proposed by Cornwall Council. They felt that this particular option (option A) would cause major environmental damage to the historic Penzance Harbour, adding that it sits at the heart of a key regeneration site and boasts a number of listed buildings.
3. The objectors felt that the planning permission which had already been secured for this scheme was flawed, as it was not possible to view or comment on the scheme as a whole, but just on one element. They added that the local objection to the scheme was overwhelming.
4. They expressed their concern about the vessel, which they felt was dictating the level of works required in the harbour rather than the other way around, and asserted that the rock element aspect of the harbour works were unnecessary. Hadrian Piggott also highlighted that alternative locations for the mainline link were possible elsewhere in Penzance as well as in Falmouth.
5. The Minister responded by explaining that the scheme as it stood had been inherited by this Government, and highlighted that it was already very far down the track, although the decision on funding had not yet been made. He referred to the EU Convergence fund, which was time limited and conditional. It was unfortunate that this brought with it a necessity to make a rushed decision, as his preference would be to slow the process down and consider less costly options.
6. He also felt that it was important to bear in mind that there would always be some level of risk in any scheme, but that it was important to consider these carefully.
7. The Minister queried their views on alternative options for the scheme, and if they were pursued, what would be the impact on funding and timescales. It was acknowledged that this would entail another round of planning permission and tender exercise, as well as potentially losing the EU funding.
8. The Minister thanked them for setting out their views on the matter and assured them of the importance of the issue to the Department.