

# True Friends of Penzance & Isles of Scilly

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Dear Sir,

## **Penzance Harbour – Planning Issues. Cornwall Council Ref: 10-0095-LBC**

We write to counter extensive lobbying against Government approval of Listed Building Consent for Penzance Harbour improvements. This was recently forwarded to you by Cornwall Council following their decision on 8 Mar 10 to “minded to approve” the scheme which is part of the Isles of Scilly Link Project.

True Friends of Penzance & Isles of Scilly is an umbrella organization representing organizations and individuals supporting Cornwall Council's plan to upgrade Penzance Harbour. It was set up in January 2010 following a disastrous Council planning decision in Dec 09 to refuse Listed Building Consent for its own project in the face of extremely hostile (and expertly executed) lobbying. Whilst set up upon the initiative of Penzance Chamber of Commerce and Penzance & District Tourism Association, True Friends represents organizations and individuals who could not be adequately represented by business organizations alone.

## **Support for Option A**

Since January 2010 we have managed to prove that whilst the project remains controversial there is extensive and strong support for planned works (termed Option A) on Penzance Harbour:

- The Penzance Chamber of Commerce supports Option A with a very large majority in favour
- Penzance and District Tourism Association supports the project with over over 90% of members in support.
- Over 3000 local residents in Penzance signed a petition in favour of Option A. 2500 of these signatures were presented to Cornwall Council prior to 8 Mar.
- 120 local businesses publically declared themselves in support in the Facebook campaign (entitled “A Future for Penzance”). The campaign attracted 3700 fans.
- Over 800 people wrote to Cornwall Council Planning Department supporting Listed Building Consent. This level of support is almost unheard of in planning circles.
- Cornwall Council Strategic Planning Committee, recognizing the high level of support for this controversial project and its responsibility to weigh off heritage considerations verses economic and community needs, voted 14 to 7 in favour of granting Listed Building Consent and 14 to 2 in favour of granting planning permission.

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## Reasons for Support

There are good reasons why the scheme has widespread support:

- a) Penzance Harbour is in a state of decay and is seen by residents as an eyesore rather than an attraction. There is insufficient revenue to maintain its historic structures let alone invest in essential facilities for future freight and passenger handling. Townsfolk know that the Harbour needs a large grant from Central Government to upgrade it, extend its life and to ensure the long term future of the ferry link.
- b) The majority of local residents want the Harbour to remain a working harbour providing jobs and trade for the Town. There are property developers and well intentioned idealists who see a primarily recreational future for the Harbour. This is not a future that local residents see as credible and they believe it is damaging to the character and economy of Penzance.
- c) After 7+ years of debate and examination of 14 alternatives (and various sub-options), the majority of townsfolk and businesses believe it is time to accept that the best compromise has been reached given the constraints of Penzance Harbour. It is considered unlikely that a better, credible, solution can be found which will not still attract opposition.
- d) The proposed design solves a pressing sea defence problem for the Barbican by building a new section of sea wall approximately 40 metres out from the existing sea wall. Alternative solutions proposed by objectors ignore this pressing problem which has safety implications for future use of South Pier.
- e) The proposed design hides the functional freight facilities behind the new and old sea wall and provides a sympathetic new passenger terminal which almost all residents see as uncontroversial.
- f) It is accepted that breeches have to be made in the existing sea wall to gain access to the reclaimed area (for freight). The section of wall is a small part of the total and part is currently reinforced on the inward side by 20<sup>th</sup> century concrete reinforcement because the original stonework has worked loose due to storm damage.
- g) The proposed reclamation affects a beach that the majority of townsfolk describe grim and unloved. It is not a beach that any normal person would take their children to. Dog walkers are allowed to exercise (and empty) their dogs on this small beach when they are prohibited from the main beaches for most of the summer.
- h) The majority of local residents in Penzance, who had no particular issue with the Council's plans, just wanted the Council to get on with it. Many felt their right to be consulted had been hijacked by a well organized lobby group against the project who claimed to represent them. There is considerable frustration and anger that a well organized, well connected and apparently well funded lobby group representing a small minority can hijack a project so important to many in the community and West Cornwall as a whole.

## Apparent Delay in Public Support.

You might reasonably ask why the widespread support for the scheme was not evident earlier. The majority of Townsfolk, including the undersigned, wrote off the objectors as cranks and assumed the plan would go ahead because the alternative was too dreadful to contemplate. Business was prominent in supporting the project but was cowed by the threat of a boycott published in a letter in the Cornishman on 15 Oct 09. An atmosphere of

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intolerance and hostility was created which made it difficult for supporters to be heard. Matters were made worse by the editorial policy of the local paper, The Cornishman, which supported objectors due to close personal links between the papers' small staff and Friends of Penzance Harbour.

When the Council voted against its own project in Dec 09 it was on the assumption that the entire population of Penzance was vehemently opposed to the scheme. It is not surprising in this atmosphere that our elected representatives voted against the project. Three months later it was accepted that there was widespread support for the scheme. This allowed a second decision to be taken primarily on the merits of the proposal and its strategic significance. In our opinion it was right and proper that the Committee should have been asked to examine the matter a second time.

The complex issues have been complicated by the actions of our local MP, Andrew George, who initially 'sat on the fence' on this issue. Following the objectors success in Dec 09 our MP embraced them and supported their agenda. This resulted in the development of Option Pz with an architect he recommended with local connections. Option Pz was announced as a solution acceptable to all if Option A should fail but in the event it became an attempt to scupper Option A with a public meeting to reveal its details four days before the second planning meeting on the 8 Mar 10.

## English Heritage

It will be a matter of concern that English Heritage have objected to the Listed Building Consent. English Heritage were originally consulted in the approval process for Harbour Revision Order. They later stiffened their position regarding the reclamation of land and breeches to the harbour wall. We believe part of the reason for this stiffening was heavy lobbying of English Heritage by Friends of Penzance Harbour. We believe that English Heritage was swayed by the argument that there were acceptable alternatives which had been ignored by the Council, arguments we believe are untrue. Alternatives which did not involve reclamation proved either impracticable or uneconomic.

Supporters of Option A are concerned about heritage; the most ardent supporters are tourism dependent businesses who have a vested interest in Penzance maintaining its charm and heritage. However, the Harbour is not a static structure and has constantly evolved since first built in the 1300s. Much of the historic structure would be protected under Option A by rock armour. Proposed heritage mitigation measures would mean that previous inappropriate ad hoc repairs will be made good. We believe the best way to protect the future of the historic harbour is to keep it as a working harbour. Too many previously working harbours in Cornwall are literally falling into the sea because nobody can afford to repair them.

## What would an enquiry achieve?

The rationale for a single vessel solution for the ferry link is well documented. Isles of Scilly residents want and need the option to travel by sea in the winter (weather can limit access by air for several days at a time). A single vessel has been shown to be significantly cheaper to run than two vessels. The single vessel is 10 metres longer and requires an extension to South Pier. The solution is conservative, logical and low risk. What can an Inquiry add to this deliberation?

South Pier is in a state of disrepair and also has severe overtopping problems in stormy weather. Rock armour is accepted by English Heritage as the acceptable solution where historic sea walls need protection or improving. There is no issue of substance to resolve in this respect.

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The building of a new sea wall to protect the Barbican and provide reclaimed land for new facilities is the most controversial aspect of the proposal. The Council's solution recognizes and addresses the issue of dangerous levels of overtopping in stormy weather. The solution provides a new sea wall 40 metres further out from the existing wall. The alternative would be rock armour as used further out on South Pier. Objectors have advocated solutions which ignore or sidestep the issue and will not accept either solution. How would an enquiry change this situation once the need for improved sea defences was confirmed as essential?

Breaches in the existing sea wall to gain access to reclaimed land between old and new sea walls are an unavoidable consequence of building the new sea wall. It is questionable that an enquiry could reveal anything new or find anything wrong with the Strategic Planning Committees careful examination and balancing of heritage considerations verses economic and community considerations.

An enquiry would be expensive and time-consuming. It has to be questioned what will be gained and whether the gain justifies the cost. The delay created by an enquiry would however advance the objectors cause in delaying the project and increasing costs to the point where the scheme has to be abandoned or radically re-scoped. We believe the call for an Inquiry is an attempt to wreck the project rather than achieve an objective view on the facts, procedures and decisions that have led to the current project solution. We also believe an adverse outcome for objectors would simply be labelled as an establishment 'stitch-up'.

## Other Options

We have not burdened you with a blow by blow rebuttal of claims made by objectors that better alternative exists but we can offer one if required. Option C proposed a new out of town freight centre for just 42 tons/day of freight. It added at least £10/ton to Islander's freight charges and was ruled out as uneconomic. Option Pz has not been the subject of any public consultation. It places the disputed freight facilities right in the heart of the harbour and sides steps the issue of improving sea defences (rock armour on Battery Rocks beach). It also requires the relocation of two businesses and the demolition of the Waterside Meadery, a popular restaurant with a Facebook campaign to "Save the Meadery" with 2300 fans. It is likely that Option Pz would face widespread objections from the public.

We hope, after consideration of all the necessary factors, you will decide to approve this vital strategic project. A large majority of residents in West Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly hope you will do so and as soon as practicable.

Yours faithfully,



RICHARD CLIFFE  
For True Friends of Penzance & Isles of Scilly.

## True Friends of Penzance & Isles of Scilly

An umbrella group for individuals and organizations supporting Penzance Harbour developments proposed under Option A. Communications/Secretary: Dick Cliffe [support@truefriend.org.uk](mailto:support@truefriend.org.uk) Tel; 01736 331734. Spokesperson: Rebecca Farrington [spokesperson@truefriend.org.uk](mailto:spokesperson@truefriend.org.uk) Mob: 0777 999 8590.