

# **Friends of Penzance Harbour**

c/o 17 Jack Lane, Newlyn, Penzance  
Cornwall, TR18 5HZ

To the Editor  
The Cornishman

10<sup>th</sup> February 2009

Dear Sir,

## **Elected representatives must reject Route Partnership plan for Penzance**

At the heart of the controversy surrounding the Route Partnership's plans for Penzance harbour and the adjacent beach by Battery Rocks, is the issue of whether or not the people of Penzance are to have a say in the future development of their town.

It has not been possible to locate the point at which a decision by elected representatives set the Route Partnership on the course that has led them to propose their current scheme. Since the people of Penzance appear not to have given their elected representatives any explicit mandate to pursue this development, and it is obviously controversial, the "straw polls" available to us take on a special importance: how else are the people we elected going to know what we want and be able to act accordingly?

From the feedback data gathered by the Route Partnership we have two figures. At the one-day exhibition in September 2008 approximately 85% of those who expressed an opinion in the feedback forms said they did not support the proposals. At their January 2009 exhibition this figure appears to have dropped to 65%, but three factors can explain this apparent strengthening of support for the Route Partnership scheme.

First, the Route Partnership spent a very substantial amount of money holding a very well manned five-day exhibition designed to convince all who attended that their scheme is just what Penzance needs. Those against the scheme were refused any space at all in the exhibition room and of course have only their own limited funds and time to explain the alternatives and why the Route Partnership scheme might not be such a good idea. Then there is the feedback questionnaire; different from the September exhibition, much more constricting in the way people were able to answer, some flagrantly biased questions, and generally rather confusing (the Route Partnership deny this but how else do you explain that nearly 5% of people supported their scheme because of the views!). Many struggled through the questionnaire and most, but almost certainly not all of them, will have read the questionnaire properly, and within its limits accurately conveyed their feelings, but over 25% of visitors to the exhibition (286 out of the 1102) didn't even attempt to fill in a feedback form. It's possible that these people were divided for and against in roughly the same proportion as the others, but it is more likely that confronted with a confusing and biased questionnaire that seemed designed to make them say "yes" when they wanted to say "no", they declined to be part of such a manipulative exercise.

Second, there is the specific content of the exhibition. Of course the Route Partnership were always going to paint their development in a favourable light, but what if the exhibition contained content on important elements of the scheme that was simply wrong, leading people to support the proposals where they might otherwise have

opposed them? The Route Partnership have already owned-up to one example of this (their claim that the scheme was not located on the Holy Headland after which Penzance is named) and another (a photomontage showing beach where no beach will exist after development) is subject to a formal complaint to Cornwall County Council. How many people did this affect? Not a huge number in all likelihood, but it would only take one in ten of those that filled in a questionnaire to have been persuaded by these key factors to take the claimed 65% against to the 85% of the previous exhibition.

Third, the Route Partnership has persistently (before and during the January exhibition, in newspapers, on radio and at the event itself) claimed that the funds for the development would be lost if not spent on their scheme, and spent quickly. We have the *Cornishman* (5/2/09, page 8) to thank for now knowing that this is simply not true, but for how many people was this the decisive point that led them to express support for the scheme, when they would otherwise have opposed it? During the January exhibition the Route Partnership also used the radio to say that a planning application would be submitted regardless of the outcome of the exhibition. Suggesting in this way that attending the exhibition (and expressing your opposition) is therefore pointless, is also likely to have reduced the number of people attending the exhibition to register a protest.

The other straw poll available to us is the exit poll conducted outside the January exhibition by the Friends of Penzance Harbour. This poll showed 85% against the Route Partnership proposals, consistent with the Route Partnership's figures from the September exhibition, but those that refused to take part in this poll were assumed to be supporters of the Route Partnership scheme. It is possible that all those "refusers" were indeed Route Partnership supporters. But it is also likely that many of them just didn't want to hang around in wind, rain and hail, that those who refused included opponents of the Route Partnership scheme, and that as a result the 85% figure is an underestimate.

At the start of the September exhibition the Route Partnership had little idea of the scale of opposition to their scheme, and no chance to come up with the strategies that they subsequently employed up to and during the January exhibition. The feedback for the September exhibition may well thus be the more accurate reflection of public opinion, and it certainly ties in with the January exit poll conducted by the Friends of Penzance Harbour.

On the basis of the above our elected representatives should assume that something close to 9 out of 10 people are against the Route Partnership's plans for Penzance seafront, and take it as their solemn duty to effectively represent the wishes of this overwhelming majority. In practical terms this means intervening to stop the Route Partnership's current scheme from going to the planning application stage, and if this is not possible then making sure that the planning application submitted is firmly rejected. Only then can alternatives be properly considered and a scheme devised that is acceptable to the people of Penzance.

Yours sincerely,

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