

Friends of Penzance Harbour

www.friendsofpzharbour.org

News Release

15th December 2009. For immediate release

Penzance Harbour: The Decision of the Strategic Planning Committee

The Friends of Penzance Harbour are deeply grateful to the members of Cornwall Council's Strategic Planning Committee for their principled 12-7 vote yesterday. Many of them had stood in the June elections on a platform of localism, and they were true to their manifesto promises.

We should remember that the Route Partnership's proposal was essentially to wreck an important historic monument and replace it with an industrial estate – complete with freight sheds, heavy lorries and forklift trucks – bang in the middle of our seafront, in a conservation area, within a stone's throw of the holy headland and the listed Jubilee Pool. Councillors from all over Cornwall said 'We wouldn't want this in our constituencies, we can't foist it on Penzance'.

We are particularly disappointed in the attitude of the Isles of Scilly Council. At every stage their response when problems with their proposal have been raised has not been 'Let's get round a table and find a way round them': it has been to threaten and bully and bluster.

Characteristically, the response of the Route Partnership and the Isles of Scilly Council to the Committee's decision has been to issue yet more threats, not to mention warnings of disaster ahead for Penzance. They are investigating ways of getting the decision overturned, and threatening to get the link moved to Falmouth.

Falmouth is not an option. Not only is the money allocated to Penzance not transferable: there are sound operational reasons – double the journey time, the extra cost of fuel (about £250,000 per year) – why that would be a nonsense, not to mention the likelihood that a private operator would start up a rival service, using a fast ferry for passengers, between Penzance and the Isles.

We understand the Islanders' frustration. They look at the Scottish Isles, and see the considerable subsidies that the operators of the sea routes connecting them to the mainland receive from the Scottish government. They get nothing comparable from London or the Duchy of Cornwall. So they have been looking to the council tax-payers of Cornwall, one of the poorest regions in the UK, and seeking to impose a cost on the people of Penzance by rejecting options that would have preserved our seafront. They should not be placed in that position.

The people behind Option A are also being very quick to blame the Friends of Penzance Harbour for their debacle. For some reason they aren't blaming English Heritage, whose perfectly proper objection to the application for Listed Building Consent would almost certainly have meant a public inquiry, drawing out the decision-making process to well beyond what we've been told is a February 2010 deadline for finalising the proposal.

We've been told that going for Option C would involve asking operators to re-tender for providing the service. That could have been done after the Cabinet decision on September 16th to have Option C investigated as well as Option A. But it wasn't. (The tenders received on October 20th were for Option A only.) There would still have been time, because of the delay that holding a public inquiry would entail. But no: the officers pig-headedly persevered with Option A only, to the point where they felt able to say to Cabinet that going for Option C would involve a delay that would cost the Council an extra £5 million. This is only one more example of jiggery-pokery on their part.

We have heard from many sources that since the unitary Cornwall Council was set up this year, it has been run by the officers, not the elected members. Thanks to the Strategic Planning Committee, it looks as though the proper, democratic order of things is being reasserted.

We emphatically do want the Scilly Link to stay in Penzance, and we will do all we can to work constructively with others to find a solution that respects the needs of both the Scillies and our town.

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Notes for Editors

- 1) The Friends of Penzance Harbour is a community group set up to oppose plans to build passenger and freight terminals on the town's historic seafront, and promote less destructive alternatives that bring real long-term benefits to the town. Its web site contains more information about the plans and local opposition to them: www.friendsofpzharbour.org
- 2) For a full copy of the English Heritage advice to Cornwall Council go to: www.friendsofpzharbour.org/blog_more.php?b=64
- 3) For the Historic Building Analysis that is part of the documentation accompanying the Cornwall Council request for listed building consent in respect of the South Pier go to: www.friendsofpzharbour.org/pdfs/HistoricBuildingAnalysis.pdf.
- 4) For pictures of the development site go to: www.flickr.com/photos/friendsofpzharbour/sets/72157622685150544/
- 5) For pictures of a recent protest go to: www.flickr.com/photos/friendsofpzharbour/sets/72157622810639288/
- 6) For pictures illustrating the history of the South Pier go to: www.flickr.com/photos/friendsofpzharbour/sets/72157622794934386/