

9<sup>th</sup> May 2011

## **Penzance Seafront – a way forward**



Over the last couple of years, the Route Partnership's Isles of Scilly Link Project has exercised and focused many minds in the community on what is appropriate development for the seafront of our town. That ultimately failed proposal has been sadly divisive for the community, but it is notable that what everyone involved in the debate wants is investment and regeneration in Penzance, and for the town to develop and thrive as a destination in its own right.

The debate has shone a bright light on one of Penzance's greatest assets - its seafront - and shown how passionately the community feels about it. The seafront faces the multiple challenges of regeneration, conservation and sea level rise, and it is vitally important that there is the widest possible community engagement with these challenges now and into the future.

The Penzance seafront comprises the Harbour and harbour car park, the Jubilee Pool and St Anthony's Gardens, the Promenade, and the PZ Gallery/Coinagehall Street site (all publicly owned by Cornwall Council), along with the old Trinity House Lighthouse Museum and the Dry Dock (both privately owned). Together, these buildings, structures and sites hold a key to the future economic regeneration of Penzance and its future social well-being, but there is no coordinated community vision for the area to ensure that any future development will be in the best interests of the town.

Cornwall Council might see the Harbour and Jubilee Pool as liabilities that it would like others to take care of, and Coinagehall Street as an asset that it could sell to private developers, while there is a general lack of confidence amongst private investors. The future of Penzance is inextricably linked to the future of its seafront and it is too important, economically and socially, to be left either to a distant local authority or to ad hoc private development.

The fortunes of the beautiful but currently redundant Trinity House building and nearby businesses would be transformed if sympathetic development opened-up the west side of the Inner Harbour. The Jubilee Pool's future must be secured for its own sake, but also because of the impact its closure would have on the value and future of all the nearby sites and buildings. Furthermore, inappropriate and limiting development of Coinagehall Street would undermine all other efforts at regeneration in the area. Finally, the whole area could be blighted if imaginative long-term approaches to sea-level rise are not used to protect the South Pier, Promenade and Jubilee Pool.

What is required is for all those passionate voices who have expressed great interest, knowledge, and concern over the IoS Link project to come together to create a real community vision for our seafront that is based on a proper understanding of the value and interconnectedness of these different places. It is in our collective ability and power to do this.

We would like to propose the establishment of a Penzance Seafront development trust to ensure that the future development of these sites is undertaken in the best interests of the town and its people, and that community-owned assets are made to work for the community in perpetuity.

A development trust is a well-tested and successful model for community empowerment and regeneration. They are inclusive, independent, community owned and managed organisations. They must be ultimately self-financing and profitable, but profits are re-invested back into the community. They work using partnerships and alliances between the community and the voluntary, private and public sectors, and are specifically engaged in the economic, environmental and social regeneration of a defined geographical area. ***Development trusts create wealth in communities – and keep it there!***

For more information go to: <http://locality.org.uk/members/development-trusts/>

A Penzance Seafront development trust would be a local champion and caretaker for the seafront and would actively seek out and co-ordinate both public and private investment in the area. In its simplest form it would be a community-led centre for planning and best practice in respect of future developments in the seafront area, but it may also be an appropriate vehicle for taking over ownership of community assets to deliver long-term social, economic and environmental benefits for Penzance. Such assets would have to be run profitably, and any profits re-invested into the less economically viable but socially important areas of the seafront.

There are inspiring examples where this approach has worked for other communities, including the port of Amble (<http://www.ambledvelopmenttrust.org.uk/>) and Coin Street on the South Bank of the Thames in London (<http://www.coinstreet.org/>).

There couldn't be a better time for the community in Penzance to take responsibility for its seafront in such a way. On a national level, the Localism Bill policies will begin to come into effect this year. On a county level, it appears that our local authority would like to step back from its involvement with the Jubilee Pool and Harbour. On a local town level it is time for the community to say what it wants from the Harbour area, the Jubilee Pool and Promenade, and from the redevelopment of the Coinagehall Street site, instead of being presented with a *fait accompli* at some point in the future.

Finally, local engagement with the issue of the Link to the Isles of Scilly and the harbour area remains high, but needs focus and direction. The Department of Transport is committed to funding a new Penzance-Isles of Scilly Link scheme. In one form or other the community must engage with this immediate challenge, and facilitating such a solution could be the Penzance Seafront development trust's first priority.

With this letter we invite comment on these ideas from private individuals, local businesses, community organisations, the Town Council, Cornwall Council and others. We feel that this approach holds considerable potential for securing a better future for Penzance, but it must be a popular, inclusive, community-driven initiative and one undertaken with honesty and transparency. Its success will depend on the imagination, ambition and energy of the community that sets it up. We are particularly interested to hear from people who are prepared to work on the definition, scope and vision of such an organisation and have the will to make it happen.

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