

Friends of Penzance Harbour

c/o John Maggs
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Cornwall, TR18 5HZ

Mr Tim Wood
Cornwall County Council
County Hall
Treyew Road
Truro
Cornwall, TR1 3AY

26th January 2009

Dear Mr Wood,

Formal Complaint: Isle of Scilly Link Exhibition, Penzance 19-23rd January 2009

I am writing on behalf of the Friends of Penzance Harbour to register a formal complaint regarding the conduct of the above exhibition, which was organised by the Route Partnership of which Cornwall County Council is a partner. Our complaint relates to the following:

1. Alternatives

The exhibition contained a section on alternatives to the Route Partnership (RP) proposals but it was not clear how those “alternatives” were selected, those proposing the alternative were not given the opportunity to respond to the RP’s analysis, and there was one particularly serious omission: the proposal for an out-of-town freight handling depot. This idea has been promoted by a number of individuals and organisations, including the Civic Society, Trythall Shipping, and Friends of Penzance Harbour, and indeed was part of the same Trythall Shipping proposal that contained the SWATH vessel that you did include in the alternatives section.

The out-of-town freight handling approach is particularly important in that it removes the need for most of the land reclaimed from Battery Rocks beach, a particularly controversial and unpopular part of the RP scheme. The approach also has the advantage of removing a large proportion of freight delivery traffic from the harbour area and would be relatively simple to set up. During the course of the exhibition we were on numerous occasions forced to explain the existence of this alternative, and it can only be assumed that many others left the exhibition and their feedback without being aware of it. Since a perception of a lack of alternatives is likely to have been one reason for people supporting the RP’s scheme we believe that this omission will have led many people who would otherwise oppose the RP scheme to have supported it.

2. Photomontages

The exhibition contained a series of photomontages designed to show the visual impact of the development. We have three specific complaints in this regard.

First, the vantage points appear to have been chosen selectively to show the development off to its best advantage, rather than give an accurate impression of how people will normally view it. Odd camera angles were used, some shots were taken so far from the proposed development site that no-one would expect to be able to see it anyway, and there was at least one extremely important vantage point omitted altogether. Despite the site being adjacent to public gardens overlooking Mounts Bay (St Anthony Gardens), not a single before and after shot was taken from this area. We find it hard to believe that this was an accident since the development is particularly intrusive from this vantage point.

Second, the scale used on the before and after photographs are not the same, having the subtle but nonetheless significant effect of making the development look less intrusive.

Thirdly, and most importantly, one picture in particular (“View of proposals from next to the war memorial”) was a gross distortion with the picture suggesting that after completion of the development there will still be sandy beach at the site; the new wall in the picture appears to be built in much the same position as the old. Your own plans, models and architect drawings show this not to be the case, but we were approached on a number of occasions by people who had been fooled by the photomontage into thinking that Battery Rocks beach would be preserved. While we were able to correct this impression with some people it must be assumed that a good many left the exhibition and their feedback misled by this important picture. Since the fate of the beach has been large in many peoples minds and has been the subject of numerous reports in the press we, again, find it hard to believe that this misrepresentation is an accident. We pointed out this particular problem to staff present at the exhibition but they did not take the opportunity to remove the misleading photomontage from the exhibition.

3. Questionnaire

The feedback form used by the RP for this exhibition was different to the one used at the exhibition in September 2008. This new form contains questions which are confusing and biased to encourage a particular answer.

The first substantive question – “What is your opinion on the need to improve the existing harbour facilities to encourage regeneration, protect related businesses and secure the lifeline sea link to the Isles of Scilly?” – raises a number of issues. First, it presupposes that any kind of development (your “improvement”) to harbour facilities will necessarily achieve one or all of those ends when that will not always be the case; some types of development will achieve one or more, some will not make any difference. The question however leaves people forced to accept that the proposed developments will, and by the question’s association with the exhibition and RP plan that the RP’s plan will

encourage these things. In particular we take issue with the suggestion that the proposed development has anything at all to do with regeneration and the wellbeing of the wider community. Secondly, by referring to “existing” facilities you imply that the developments being proposed are about improving what already exists when in fact you are creating a whole new facility adjacent to the existing facilities (and destroying Battery Rocks beach in the process). Thirdly, there are reasons other than you list for wanting to improve existing arrangements within the harbour, e.g., to reduce heavy freight traffic on Wharf Road and its approaches and/or to create a more integrated transport network, but by leaving them out of your list you failed to provide exhibition visitors with the opportunity of supporting developments (improvements) that would serve these ends. Since these are two key concerns of the public that the RP proposals do not address that was, to say the least, an unfortunate omission.

The next question was “What is your opinion on the proposed improvements?”, and we believe this is a simple case of “leading the witness”. The use of the word “improvements” instead of the neutral alternative “developments” is clearly likely to result in a more positive response to the question and a more favourable reported assessment of the RP’s scheme.

The last part of the form is entitled “Main reason for support or objection:” and contains a series of labelled tick boxes, but it is not clear which of these boxes relates to “support” and which relates to “objection”. We had a number of people approach us who simply did not know what to tick. This section also contained an “If other, please specify” section that was little bigger than the side of a matchbox, again suggesting to people that there was no way of expressing opinions that didn’t fit within the very close and biased bounds of the rest of the form. We know from speaking to people that many used the backs of the forms (and we trust that you will report these comments in full), but it can be assumed that many others simply failed to properly convey their feelings.

Taken together the above failures in the questionnaire appear designed to result in a more favourable reported assessment of the scheme than would have been the case otherwise, calling into question any data subsequently acquired from it.

Since the outcome of this exhibition will play a part in informing subsequent decisions about a multi-million pound project affecting a whole community for many years to come, it was especially important that it be handled in a open, fair and transparent way. The above described failings in the process make it clear that this has not been the case, and thus we are forced to make this formal complaint.

We understand that you have a formal complaints procedure under which this will be handled and look forward to hearing from you further.

Yours sincerely,

John Maggs
Friends of Penzance Harbour