

[Letter to *The Cornishman* from Cllr Graeme Hicks; published 28/1/10]

[FoPzH comments in red]

Dear Madam

I must take issue with John Maggs for his letter in last week's *Cornishman*. In my opinion, it is a compendium of such wild and unsupported allegations, gross misrepresentations and factual inaccuracies that one must wonder why, for the following reasons, any rational person could support such arrant nonsense.

See below for comments on the substantive points, which are as misguided and incorrect as his more vitriolic comments.

- It really is outrageous, for a person to ridicule his critics when their letters are well argued and when there is no indication of where their arguments might be wrong. Has he no sense of shame and is he so perfect that he cannot tolerate any criticism? It is not only impossible to conduct a rational discussion with this man but it seems inexplicable why that advocate of 'calm and reasoned debate' can support him.

Cllr Hicks has been invited on numerous occasions to come to Penzance and discuss the issue with objectors. He has always refused that discussion, preferring instead to attend meetings in the town organised by his supporters.

- His favoured response to criticism seems to be to accuse his critics of the very same criticism that they have levelled against him. This can be seen in his initial remarks and, if intemperate language has been used, one can well understand the frustration which people undoubtedly feel.
- The claim that the vast majority have consistently opposed Option A is unsubstantiated and lacks credibility. Mike Sagar Fenton (Old Mike) goes even further by claiming the support of the WHOLE community, which reminds one of those extraordinary claims by Soviet and Nazi propagandists and is patently absurd?

The evidence for our claims about public support is as follows:

1. At a Route Partnership (RP) consultation in 2004 the public rejected the plan that the current scheme is based on.
2. Feedback forms filled in by the public at the September 2008 "pre-planning" exhibition showed **85% against** the scheme.
3. Feedback forms filled in at the January 2009 repeat "pre-planning" exhibition showed **65% against** the scheme (concerns were raised about the RP biased questionnaire).
4. The Friends of Penzance Harbour exit poll at the same event showed more than **85% against**.

5. In February 2009 Penzance Town Council voted against the scheme with just one dissenting voice.
6. In May 2009 planning permission was sought and **672 letters of objection** were received by planners; there were just 8 (eight) letters of support.
7. In June 2009 local elections were held and no candidate came out in support of the scheme; those that expressed a view were against.
8. In August 2009 the local newspaper – *The Cornishman* – conducted a poll and **66% said “no”** to the current scheme.
9. In October 2009 the local MP held a public meeting and of the 500 plus people in the audience **just 3 (three) voted in support** for the current scheme.
10. The local MP and prospective parliamentary candidates from the other main parties (Conservative, Labour, Green and Mebyon Kernow) have all expressed a preference for alternatives.
11. All Cornwall Council councillors for the Penzance area are against.
12. In December 2009 there were **669 written objections** (just 4 (fours) in support) made to the request for Listed Building Consent, and the request was subsequently refused by 12 votes to 7.
13. In January 2010 *The Cornishman* conducted a second poll and **70% voted against** the current scheme.

We would like to ask Cllr Hicks what evidence he has to show that people in Penzance support Option A?

- Option A really IS the only site which meets the requirement of the lowest transit costs to the Isles of Scilly. It is, after all, almost identical with the present site, with only a modest extension to the west of the public toilets. The western face of South Pier shows signs of disintegrating and the cost of remedial work, in which concrete faced with granite will be used, will be covered by the grant. However, I have to say that unless the project goes ahead there is a real risk that the cost of remedial work will have to be borne, not by FoPZH and the local MP, but by the unfortunate taxpayer. Only a part of the so-called beach, where apparently a sewage outlet pipe was once laid, will be lost, in spite of the wild claims by Mr Maggs and his associates.

Option A may or may not have the lowest transit costs to the Scillies, but this isn't just about the Scillies and transit costs, it is also about Penzance, and the local residents have a right to say what they do and do not want done with their harbour and seafront. As it happens we are confident that an independent appraisal of alternatives will produce an alternative option that is no more costly to run than Option A.

The Harbour Master has recently described a need for “routine maintenance” of the pier; nothing more. Cllr Hicks' suggestion that the pier is close to falling down is obviously self-serving.

- It is a colossal untruth, in the tradition of the infamous Dr Joseph Goebbels, to claim that NOT a shred of evidence has been adduced to support either Option A or the Falmouth option. This is astonishingly rich in view of the failure to give reasons for the FoPzH's statement that there are alternative sites to Option A available in the Penzance area. Perhaps, we can now hear what they are and who has identified them.

What we said was that there is not a “shred of *reliable independent evidence*”.

Regarding alternative sites the Council's own consultants admitted that Option C was “workable” and no-one has so far said why the Trythall Shipping proposal would not work. The argument is always on running costs, but on the only occasion where we were allowed to see the running cost figures they were obviously flawed.

- While we have never suggested that the use of Falmouth would be a viable option, we have suggested that it MAY prove to be after a business case has been built up. The point, which we have consistently argued, is that, if Option A cannot be utilised then, in the absence of suitable alternatives, Falmouth would have to be considered. Perhaps, Mr Maggs could explain, if the FoPzH can decide that the most suitable site in Penzance cannot be used, on what grounds are Scillonians to be denied the right to search for one elsewhere? One does feel sorry for Mr Maggs, who seems to be so consumed with the idea of threats and of conspiracy that he is quite unable to accept that it is our responsibility to people to acquaint them with the consequences of certain courses of action.

It is reassuring to hear that they “have never suggested that Falmouth would be a viable option”.

The Route Partnership's own consultants ruled Falmouth out in 2004. Rising fuel costs in the period since then have made the suggestion even less likely.

- The charge that the County Council hired consultants merely to produce a justification for the choice of a site which they had already selected, is a baseless and vile allegation which unequivocally we reject. It is such a disgraceful slur on the integrity of the former County Council and its most reputable consultants that he would be advised to substantiate it or withdraw it forthwith.

We're sure he does reject it but most people looking at what has happened are happy enough with that analysis. It fits the evidence available.

- The minister did say, it is true, that there was no deadline as such for the submission of proposals, but he has also said that account should be taken of the forthcoming general election and there is, of course, the fact of the precarious state of the nation's finances, which mean that it would be imprudent to assume that grant funding would necessarily be available after the end of this January.

As Cllr Hicks effectively admits in the briefing papers for this week's Cabinet meeting Option A is not deliverable before the election either. If the election is the big deadline and we have missed it then let's take the opportunity presented to find a popular alternative.

- Mr Maggs' comprehension of basic economic concepts seems to be extremely limited. He is completely wrong to criticise Mr Bennets for merely stating a self evident truth in economics that a significant cost would be incurred at Longrock, where the additional handling, associated with the extra unloading and loading, would increase costs. He also is incorrect when he criticises Mr Curtis for the reason stated at the end of the previous paragraph.

We said there would be no “extra” handling. There is double handling in any system that doesn’t involve delivery direct to the ship. Both the depot on Battery Rocks beach and an out of town depot involve double handling; in that regard they are comparable.

Clearly a decision didn’t have to be taken by the end of January or the project would have been shelved by now, a decision by the end of January being impossible.

- Perhaps Mr Maggs might tell us whether the lady he mentions in his concluding paragraph is one of the band of up-country environmentalist supporters he can call upon in his campaigns.

Given her views it seems likely that she is a supporter of ours but the letter was her own and we suggest Cllr Hicks and others concentrate on the message rather than the messenger.

The truth is that there is a rising tide of revulsion against Mr Maggs and his friends. Fortunately, this sad chapter in the history of Penzance is rapidly coming to an end, thanks to the steadfastness and courage of a number of its residents, who have refused to be browbeaten by what can only be described as a discredited and an utterly despicable mob, who have elevated selfishness and ruthlessness to such levels.

An “utterly despicable mob” pursuing an objective that is supported by the local MP, almost all Cornwall councillors in the area, the Town Council, a cross section of local businesses and most of the residents of Penzance.

Yours faithfully

Graeme Hicks CC [Executive Member for Highways, Transportation and Planning]