

Friends of Penzance Harbour

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

An open letter to
the inhabitants of the
Isles of Scilly

16th February 2009

Dear Scillonians,

Route Partnership plans for Penzance and the Isles of Scilly.

As you will probably have gathered from the press many of us mainlanders are unhappy with the Route Partnership's proposals for Penzance harbour. Please be assured however that the strength of our hostility to the Route Partnership's scheme is matched by our belief in the importance of the sea link to the Scillies. We would like to explain our concerns about the Route Partnership's scheme and describe the alternatives that we think should be considered.

From over here it looks as if you are broadly speaking happy with what is being proposed and indeed that you have been consulted and had your concerns addressed by the Route Partnership. No such process has taken place here; instead our objections have been met with a repeat exhibition and an insistence that regardless of what we say or think the Route Partnership will plough ahead with their plans. Close to 9 out of 10 people are against what is being proposed for Penzance.

The most controversial aspect of the scheme is the creation of a passenger terminal, freight depot, and lorry parking and turning space on a prominent beach and waterfront location between the Lighthouse Pier and the Jubilee Pool. This is perhaps the prettiest and historically most important part of Penzance and not the place for an industrial estate-style development of this kind. The scheme also includes plans to lengthen and disfigure the listed Lighthouse Pier to accommodate a longer new *Scillonian*.

As an alternative to this we would like to see the creation of an out-of-town freight handling depot with containerised freight brought to the harbour each day for immediate loading onto the ship. Apart from removing the need to concrete over 5000 square meters of beach and foreshore between the Lighthouse Pier and Jubilee Pool, Cornwall County Council traffic surveys indicate that this would remove between 200 and 250 freight-related vehicle movements from the harbour area for every freight sailing to the Scillies; containers would be brought from the depot to the ship in just 3-4 lorry movements. The passenger terminal, which takes up only a small part of the reclaimed land, could then be built on an existing harbour side site. By their own admission this is an approach that the Route Partnership have not considered.

While we have looked at this approach from the perspective of Penzance, its historic waterfront and heavily congested harbour area, we think it might also carry advantages for Hugh Town and the Scillies. In particular, if freight arrived in the Scillies in containers those containers could be transferred to a site away from the harbour area for unpacking and distribution, removing the need for a large freight shed on a prominent and sensitive waterside site. As with Penzance this would reduce traffic congestion and more effectively separate passengers from freight. Containerisation

would also mean a better quality freight service with goods no-longer exposed to the elements during loading and unloading of the ship.

We also have doubts about the replacement of the existing two ship operation with a single larger combined freight and passenger vessel. Apart from requiring the lengthening of Penzance's listed Lighthouse Pier and the loss of a number of small - craft moorings adjacent to the new vessel's storm berth on the Albert Pier, this approach seems to fly in the face of operational logic. A two ship operation much more effectively separates freight and passengers on the quays, it allows sailing times to suit the different needs of freight and passengers (freight can arrive in Scilly early enough to be off the quays before they get busy with visitors), and it avoids the cost of pushing an expensive passenger ship back and forward to the Scillies all winter long with no passengers on it. The proposed single new combined vessel will be expensive to build and more costly to run and maintain, all things that will impact on freight charges. Winter operation of the passenger vessel will also dramatically reduce its design life, and with one ship instead of two the danger of mechanical failure or other incident leading to the absence of a sea link to the mainland is also greater. Since the new ship will be too big to be dry-docked in Penzance the chance of affecting a swift mid-season repair will also be reduced. It has also been suggested that if the new vessel was a passenger-only one it might be faster with a reduction in journey times boosting day-visitors to the Islands.

The Department of Transport have recently confirmed that the funding earmarked for the harbour improvements in Penzance and Scilly is not in jeopardy if the people who are to be affected by the developments need more time to consider alternatives and get the scheme right. The people of Penzance would certainly like that time. We believe that a number of questions about what is being planned remain unanswered, and that less destructive alternatives, including the out-of-town freight depot approach, should be properly considered. While we review the possibilities for Penzance, perhaps Scillonians might also take the opportunity to spend a little extra time to make sure that what is being planned for Scilly is really in the best interests of the Islands.

Your thoughts on the above concerns and alternatives to the Route Partnership scheme would be welcomed.

Yours sincerely,

John Maggs
Friends of Penzance Harbour
www.friendsofpzharbour.org