

Public Opinion

It is the folly of too many to mistake the echo of a London coffee-house for the voice of the kingdom.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) Irish-born English satirist.

- 1.1. It is of obvious importance to consider what the local people think of the development proposals. While a number of surveys have been conducted to ascertain the views of the local population, it is right to be most cautious in reaching conclusions without having the background and without the methodology being put under scrutiny.
- 1.2. To that end, attention is drawn to the following factual comment before considering those less than carefully-posed questions which sought to arrive at some 'firm' conclusions about past and current public attitudes to the proposed development.
- 1.3. Historically the people of Carlyon Bay have been very opposed to developing the beaches at Crinnis, Shorthorn and Polgaver. Planning history clearly shows that local people have opposed every attempt to develop the beaches.
- 1.4. Following the purchase of the site by The Ampersand group Ltd., in 2002, an application was made in 2003 to further extend the planning conditions attached to the site. Planning applications were made to include provision of fitness suites, swimming pools, a substantial retail area, restaurants, and bars with underground parking and the erection of a revised apartment block to include a hotel. The proposed development and these amendments received considerable local opposition. A petition of 978 names was raised at very short notice representing the vast majority of local residents and requesting GOSW to call this development in for a Public Inquiry. Nearly one thousand local people objected to the proposed development.
- 1.5. On 5th August 2003, Mrs. Gloria Price, of Appletree Lane, Carlyon Bay, applied to Cornwall County Council to register the three beaches as a new town or village green pursuant to s. 13 of the Commons registration act 1965.
- 1.6. This application was supported by 386 people from Carlyon Bay from 262 households. This represented 62% of the households in Carlyon Bay. Eighty two residents made their own written statements in support of the application.
- 1.7. The following are quotes taken from those statements:

"It grieves me to think that access to this communal place may soon be denied to us by a huge development." Mrs. F Taylor Cypress Avenue.

"The accessibility of the beach has been one of the main advantages of living in Carlyon Bay and we are very distressed that more and more facilities are being denied to us – it seems that if one has enough money and backing from big business one can get away with anything and take over whatever one fancies." Mrs. V.A.Strickland Beach Road.

"As a child my family and I used the beach for the same reasons, therefore I have been enjoying the surroundings and the fact that we would meet up with a crowd for over 40 years. Friends, Family and ourselves are devastated that this has all been ripped away from us." Mrs. D CoombeTregrehan Mills.

"I am horrified by the scale of the proposed project." Mrs. S.M. Hebden Sea Road.

"The idea of covering most of this magnificent stretch of coast with a mass of concrete fills me with horror." Mr. J.A.Davis Beach Road.

- 1.8. At the subsequent Public Inquiry into this application, twenty seven people gave oral evidence in support of the claim.
- 1.9. Whilst the application failed on a point of law it gives a clear indication of the strength of feeling that was felt by local people who were clearly opposed to any development of the scale envisaged.
- 1.10. In 2009 there was a local election for a Councillor to represent the views of the people of Carlyon bay and the surrounding area. Mr. John Oxenham was a candidate in that election and was subsequently elected. In Mr. Oxenham's own campaign literature he states:-

'Sort out the Beach Project. John believes enough is enough, he said "Almost everyone I speak to thinks it's time we got our beach back. The current proposal is too large. I want to see something on the old footprint that doesn't cover Crinnis, Shorthorn, Polgaver.'"

- 1.11. Also under a banner headline "Let's get our beach back!" he wrote:-

"The developers keep pushing for a huge development that would cover Crinnis, Shorthorn and Polgaver and create a dangerous precedent for concreting over other beaches in Cornwall."

- 1.12. He further said in his attempt to represent the local views:-

"If I'm elected I will tell them enough is enough: St Austell wants its beach back and the developers need to be realistic about what goes there."

- 1.13. The significance of this is that John Oxenham was duly elected. The campaign he conducted was, by its very nature, a broad survey of local people and they responded by supporting the views and claims he made within his campaign literature.
- 1.14. In 2010 a public survey was conducted by Councillor Oxenham. This paper survey purported to gauge public opinion in the Carlyon Bay area regarding the proposed development of the beaches. From nearly 400 survey forms posted there were some 222 responses. This represents just over 50% of those polled. A copy of this survey is included in the appendix together with Mr. Oxenham's own conclusions.
- 1.15. With regard to question 4 '*How do you feel about the planned developments?*' 35% said that it was unacceptable. Those polled who replied that it was acceptable but with some or significant reservations were not given any opportunity to indicate what those reservations were.
- 1.16. The problem with this question is that it implies that a development is inevitable. It does not give an opportunity for respondents to choose 'no development'.
- 1.17. If a survey asked two questions; 'Do you wish to be gassed?' or 'Do you wish to be shot?' and - assuming there was a response- then should there be a higher percentage of respondents who replied positively to being gassed one could draw the conclusion that it was acceptable to gas people. Had an additional question been posed; 'Would you prefer not to have us kill you at all?' would clearly elicit a different response.
- 1.18. As a result, the survey conducted by Mr. Oxenham allowed both sides of the debate to claim that there was overwhelming support for their respective positions. The only conclusion one can draw from such opposite conclusions is that the survey was badly worded in the first place and its overall conclusions should be viewed with a degree of scepticism. However, that being said, there was one question - and its responses- which has some significance.
- 1.19. Question 10 asked: Under the current proposals, Polgaver beach will not be developed but will be made available for community use. What, if any, facilities would you like to see provided?
- 1.20. In response to question 10, 80.8% responded with 'None - leave it to nature.'

- 1.21. In this case respondents were given the opportunity to say no, and they overwhelmingly did so.
- 1.22. This is far less ambiguous, and clearly shows a sentiment towards beaches in general being left to nature.
- 1.23. What then of the view held by Cornwall Council themselves ? Attention is drawn to the minutes of their Planning (Development Control) Committee dated 26 July 2007. (Copy attached.)
- 1.24. This meeting discussed the result of the decision by the Secretary of State to refuse the application for the revised sea wall and beach refurbishment.
- 1.25. At Paragraph 10:-
- ".....The rejection of this application provides encouragement to the County Council's approach for a more sustainable comprehensive scheme to be brought forward to utilise the previously developed part of the site."*
- 1.26. Cornwall County Council clearly does not support the scale of this development.
- 1.27. It is clearly evident that the developer cannot claim overwhelming support for their vision on the beach.
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