

FALMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a special meeting of the Council held on Monday 25th October 2021 at 6 pm held in the Atherton Suite, The Old Post Office, The Moor, Falmouth.

Present: Councillors S D Eva (Town Mayor), K J Edwards (Deputy Mayor), G W Chin-Quee BEM, D E Clegg, L D Coley, D V Evans BEM, A J Jewell CC, J S Kirkham CC, J C Robinson, B M A Ross, A J Rowe, D W Saunby CC, E E Seiler, J M Spargo and Z Young

In Attendance: A M Williams (Town Clerk)
D Sharpe (Communications Officer)

C5527 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received and approved from Councillor G F Evans (ill).

C5528 INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

None received.

C5529 CORNWALL COUNCIL LEISURE REVIEW – SHIPS AND CASTLES LEISURE CENTRE, FALMOUTH

Councillor Robinson and the Council's Communications Officer reported upon the extensive public consultation that had been undertaken, engagement had included two public meetings organised by the Town Council as well as participation at meetings run by others. Residents had advised that the Cornwall Council consultation form had been difficult, and the Town Council had run its own questionnaire with over 1500 respondents, which was statistically valid and was an accurate reflection of community feeling.

The Town Council consultation had shown a clear mandate that the Pendennis Headland remained undeveloped. The existing Ships and Castles was well used and well liked by children and families. There was a strong local call for a 25-metre pool to be provided but not at the cost of developing the headland.

In respect of the Cornwall Council consultation, it was remiss that Falmouth was not considered a Tier 1 area and the timescales for local proposals to be developed were unrealistic.

It was proposed by Councillor Edwards, seconded by Councillor Spargo and

RESOLVED that the relevant Standing Order be temporarily suspended to enable public speaking.

The Town Mayor allowed Tom Hicks to address the meeting and report further on community engagement and raise a question regarding the report.

It was proposed by Councillor Eva, seconded by Councillor Edwards and

RESOLVED that the attached consultation response be agreed and submitted by the Communications Officer to Cornwall Council with a request that the Town Council be fully engaged in any discussions that Cornwall Council undertake regarding community solutions for the retention of the Ships and Castles facility.

There being no further business to transact the Town Mayor declared the meeting closed at 6.45 pm.

Signed..... Date.....

FALMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL RESPONSE TO CORNWALL COUNCIL'S CONSULTATION ON GLL
CONTRACT AND LEISURE SERVICES AND PROPOSED CLOSURE OF SHIPS AND CASTLES
LEISURE CENTRE ON 1ST APRIL 2022.

Background

Cornwall Council owns leisure centres across Cornwall, including Ships and Castles in Falmouth. In 2017 Cornwall Council awarded GLL a 25 year contract to run all of Cornwall Council's leisure centres at no cost to the council.

GLL were given loans at the beginning of the contract and have also been given grants to help them through Covid.

GLL have already backed out of parts of the contract including the Princess Pavilion, which is now owned and run by Falmouth Town Council.

Now they have asked to stop running four more leisure centres in Cornwall: Ships and Castles, Wadebridge, Saltash and Launceston plus the hydrotherapy pool in St Austell – unless they are given subsidies.

Cornwall Council says it has no budget to subsidise centres and unless others come forward to do it, they will close on April 1st. The Council has launched a draft strategy review and a six week public consultation.

Ships and Castles is different to other centres in that it is a fun pool and does not have a lot of other facilities to generate income. It is also built on an iconic site on the headland of Falmouth, surrounded by wild areas, a contaminated site and areas of historic value. Cornwall Council are considering its value as a development site but have given mixed messages about whether they would allocate any receipts to leisure services in Cornwall

Following surveys, conversations with residents of all ages and public meetings, this is Falmouth Town Council's response to the draft Leisure Services Strategy and to the public consultation, particularly with regard to Ships and Castles.

Draft Strategic Review of Leisure Services

2.5 Cornwall Council's vision is "a network of leisure activities and facilities across Cornwall that contribute to local health, well being and the economy of Cornwall."

We agree with this vision.

4.22 “The geography of Cornwall, its scale and dispersed communities makes planning strategically very difficult. Therefore the future provision of services is less about how many there are but where they are located, their quality and accessibility i.e. the communities they serve. A key priority is to ensure that all communities are within access of a swimming pool, to ensure everyone is able to swim.”

We agree. These are strong arguments for retaining a swimming pool in Falmouth in the largest population centre in Cornwall, giving access to as many as possible. The geography of Cornwall makes access for residents more challenging and that needs to be given more weight in decision making.

6.9 “CORE OFFER within a 20-30 minutes drive time catchment area of all Cornwall residents.”

There is too much emphasis on access for car drivers. Although car ownership is high in Cornwall, for many it is an expensive necessity not a luxury (6.6). This is a case for making services more accessible by other means, not less. Encouraging use of cars to access services also conflict with (1) of the six transitions in The Cornwall Plan and the Council’s Business Plan: A creative carbon zero economy. (p1)

Summary Consultation

Cornwall Council announced the consultation into Leisure Services in conjunction with the news that GLL wished to withdraw from the contract to run Ships and Castles.

We note that information from a survey on participation in physical activity (August 2021) is based on 525 responses, less than 0.001% of Cornwall’s population. Just 9 responses were from Ships and Castles.

Many people have found the current consultation document and survey difficult and feel it does not give the opportunity to reflect their views. Some questions are doubled up, weighted or designed to produce a desired answer. People feel that the consultation is designed to validate the closure of the four leisure centres that GLL no longer wants to run.

Following the launch of the consultation, Cornwall Council put out a public statement that one alternative was to sell off the headland site for development and use the proceeds for ‘other priorities’.

Unfortunately, these issues have raised doubts about Cornwall Council’s intentions and Falmouth Town Council regrets this. We believe that the problems facing us over leisure services are best addressed together but trust and transparency are essential to productive partnerships.

Falmouth Town Council asks that future consultations are approached in a more co-operative way and give a genuine voice to people in our town.

Design Principles:

- A network of public leisure facilities that will provide the vast majority of the residents in Cornwall access within 30 minutes (by car) to: Sports Halls, Swimming Pools, Health & Fitness Centres.

This is a minimum requirement. It is not a reason to close centres that offer facilities closer at hand.

Apart from Ships and Castles, the only centres within 30 minutes of Falmouth are Helston and Truro - 24 minutes and 27 minutes according to Google maps – but it is very doubtful that either can be reached even by car in 30 minutes during the holiday season.

If users were to drive to other centres, this would also add thousands of miles of car journeys in Cornwall, put pressure on other centres and add to road congestion and carbon emissions.

For the many people unable to afford a car, unwilling to drive or who do not have access to a car all the time (for example because their partner uses it for work), the journey by bus is expensive, closer to an hour and inconvenient. This hits hardest on carers (who are mostly though not exclusively women), the disabled and the disadvantaged. For a family of four, a trip to Truro with children would cost around £40 and take 60 – 90 minutes with changes and some walking. They would effectively be excluded from swimming activity.

- There will be at least one leisure centre in each of the 6 former District Council areas.

Why is the Council using boundaries that were abolished in 2009 for a review 13 years later? It should be looking at up to date information on access, population and transport.

- All facilities, within the context of local circumstances, should provide

a) a balanced offer, including:

- Pay and play activities
- Membership
- Programmed courses and activities
- Club use
- Targeted activities for young children
- Targeted activities for older people and those with a disability

- Targeted activities for those who are inactive
- Targeted activities for families
- Events and competitions
- Social prescribing and GP Referral

Falmouth Town Council agrees with the aspirations but does not agree that facilities that do not offer the whole range of provision should be closed without replacement.

Removing local access to Ships and Castles will not increase participation by the target groups, it will have the opposite effect. (See above re public transport times and costs.)

b) A comprehensive concessionary pricing regime to support participation amongst the vulnerable and most disadvantaged.

c) Targeted outreach and marketing to encourage use by communities who are most deprived or are not traditional users of leisure centres.

As above. Closing Ships and Castles and asking people to travel 30 minutes by car or an hour (minimum) by public transport will work against these goals.

- The sustainability of public leisure centres is dependent on usage of the centres. If a centre becomes unsustainable due to lack of use, closure of the centre would need to be considered.

We object to this. Usage of the centres is also dependent on the quality of the offer to residents and the efficiency of the operator. Falmouth Town Council's experience of taking on the Princess Pavilion from GLL demonstrates that footfall can be significantly increased by improving what is on offer.

Many people in Falmouth have expressed their dissatisfaction with aspects of GLL priorities and management. Given the value and importance of leisure centres to health and well being Cornwall Council should first look at how the centres are being managed and how they can be improved before moving to the extreme measure of closure.

- The potential of our open spaces, playing fields, community centres, schools and colleges should be maximised by enabling our community groups, sports clubs and volunteers to bring local leisure opportunities to life for people of all ages and abilities. We will help local communities to innovate and develop financially sustainable delivery models.

We agree and Falmouth Town Council is actively engaged in improving our facilities. We would be interested in more information about how Cornwall Council seeks to enable our local groups and volunteers and what help it can offer as we have several projects that we are supporting and considering, such as the Dracaena Skatepark, the Trescobeas sports pitch and BMX track, the Kimberley Park Lodge and the Green Corridor.

We do not see this as a reason to close our swimming pool – the site at Ships and Castles has huge potential and could be utilised for additional activities to support the continued operation of the centre.

- Falmouth is 'Tier 2' for Leisure Services

In Falmouth's Neighbourhood Development Plan Leisure, one of the key objectives is

- **Building or improving places and spaces for the delivery of cultural and health and wellbeing activities, thereby tackling deprivation, raising/delivering expectation and ensuring services are adequate for Falmouth and the surrounding area, including a 'cultural hub'.**

Also: Leisure, Recreation and Culture (Theme 3) our aim is to

- **Improve our leisure and sporting facilities.**

Falmouth Town Council does not accept the designation of Falmouth as Tier 2 – a "smaller town and catchment area". There has been no dialogue with the town on this decision.

Falmouth is the largest town in Cornwall and it also serves Penryn, the university campus and numerous villages. It is clear that it should be Tier 1.

We are concerned we have been put in this category in order to justify the closure of Ships and Castles.

- **The Falmouth Ships and Castles site lends itself to redevelopment to support other council priorities.**

The headland site is visible from a large part of Falmouth – it is iconic, a part of the landscape and valued as such. This land is in the hands of Cornwall Council but that does not absolve the council of the responsibility of stewardship of the land on behalf of Falmouth.

Selling it off to fund other council priorities is not acceptable. The majority of residents want the site to be protected.

Falmouth's Neighbourhood Development Plan recently passed by referendum of the town does not favour development of the headland.

There is a general presumption in the NDP for protecting valued green space.

- **Policy FOS3 doesn't appear to support development (Pendennis Point Improvement Plan)**
- **Improvement Project FOS1 is applicable and doesn't include reference to 'built' development**
- **Policy DG6 Design in the Historic Environment is applicable**
- **Policies DG7 & 8 Design in the Conservation Area or affecting the setting of the Conservation Area are applicable.**
- **Policy DG11 Impact on views and vistas is applicable.**

Community Solutions

Cornwall Council has said that Ships and Castles will be closed unless the community comes up with solutions to make the centre viable.

Swimming lessons are vital to a coastal community. Physical activity and sports are key to the health and well being of people in our town. We are concerned at the principle of running leisure centres for profit and believe that Cornwall Council must invest in leisure activities that will help tackle health inequalities and improve health outcomes for local people. The best way to do this may well be by taking centres back in-house.

GLL have had four years to come up with ideas to make Ships and Castles viable and despite the large sums of money being given and loaned to the company, they have not done so.

Falmouth's community has been given six weeks to come up with solutions and have not been given access to information that would help us find a solution.

Falmouth Town Council does not at present have the capacity to take over Ships and Castles, at least partly because we have recently taken over Princess Pavilions, another of Falmouth's iconic landmarks that was leased out to GLL and recently handed back. With Town Council backing and investment from the precept, this is on the way to a viable and sustainable future.

In the event that Cornwall Council does not accept the need to keep leisure centres open, Falmouth Town Council is keen to work with community groups to find a solution to the viability of Ships and Castles and will offer whatever support it can.

It is vital that Cornwall Council delays the closure of Ships and Castles and provides adequate information on accounts and running costs of the centre right away, to give the community the chance to make plans.

We request that as Cornwall Council was willing to invest in GLL, it now invests in the people of Falmouth either with a commitment to keeping our centre open or to enable this community to find the solution to retaining and improving the Ships and Castles facility, which is essential to the largest town in Cornwall and many of the neighbouring smaller towns, villages and hamlets.