

Chairman's Report
October 2011.

As we hear reports of sub-zero temperatures and snow in October the world of planning and conservation and design is preparing, so it feels, to hibernate! The Council is embroiled in budgeting and things do not look good. Further significant savings will be required (up to £50m), although there is still talk of a capital programme. Uncertainty about the incinerator project at St Dennis, where a Judicial Review against the Secretary of State (not the Council) has given rise to both a judgement against the Secretary of State and leave to appeal, is further concentrating minds and may lead to a severe reigning in of capital plans.

Foremost in the Council's expansive plans (which include setting up a fund to provide a local replacement for the Education Maintenance Allowance) is the stadium. A strategic objection has been lodged by the Highways Agency regarding the impact of traffic flows generated by the stadium and concomitant housing (1500 dwellings) on the functioning of Chiverton Roundabout. The Council is hoping to mount a referendum next year (tagged on to the 'election' of a Commissioner for the Devon & Cornwall Police!) to seek public support for taking over the A30. Reduced to a 'county road' this would mean that the task of dualing the A30 and 'managing' junctions would be reduced because standards would also reduce. At the same time, costs to the Council of maintaining a major trunk route (which, at the moment, is the main arterial supply route into Cornwall for food, consumer durables and all other commodities to supply Cornwall's burgeoning and unsustainable population) would add a significant chunk to an already pressured budget.

The stadium project is gaining much public support due to the PR campaign headed by the West Briton. However, publicity is not a planning consent. The HA objection is a holding objection pending traffic management evidence. Kenwyn Parish Council, which is under severe pressure at the moment, has formally objected to the scheme. The business plan remains unpublished and Cornwall's capital programme may not be capable of providing sufficient finance. The business plan is the matter of most concern and looks as if it is being bolstered by significant additional development of office and commercial space to provide an endowing rental income – this will, of course, have an impact upon the commercial vitality of the town centre – an issue which is not being 'coped' in the present exercises. The stadium will also further erode the usefulness of the park and ride scheme to the town centre, especially where events at a stadium coincide with key shopping days and seasons.

The so-called Eastern Park & Ride remains in the Planning Department's in-tray. Again, procedure is in abeyance whilst traffic figures are developed and submitted. The ecological and environmental assessments are in-hand. I remain very concerned about the management of run-off water and the risks to the River Fal Special Area of Conservation (A European designation).

However, it is the impact on the town centre which is of most concern. Apart from an out-of-town supermarket competing with the town centre ¹the road proposals – especially the right turn from Boscawen Bridge into Quay Street, which are the most controversial aspect of the scheme as far as the town centre is concerned. I have written on your behalf to the Conservation Officer of Cornwall Council to ask him to assess the impact upon the Conservation Area and listed buildings of the transit of over 100 buses per day passing through the town centre streets. We should remember that the proposed route includes Prince's Street which includes several of Truro's most important buildings.

¹ And failing to provide a balancing in-town supermarket to replace Somerfield - despite the old store being vacant and there being a crying need to consider how we can improve on this least attractive area of 1960s 'functional brutalism', as well as a densely populated neighbourhood radiating from Hendra and Redannick which needs a local convenience store.

I also remain very concerned about the effect of this second incursion into Higher Tresemple Farm (the first was the Belvedere development), and the effect of breaching the Newquay Road stop line.

Work is getting under way on the Neighbourhood Plan. I have reservations about this but feel that the new alliance between Truro city Council and Kenwyn PC is a mature development which should strengthen our joint abilities to try and ensure that our communities evolve according to their wishes, and in a sensible and positive manner. However, there is an overriding sense that, despite all the chit-chat about localism and community empowerment, Truro is being meddled with by people who sit in meetings we know nothing about, undertake studies and projects in which they do not involve us, and map destinies which are not only secret from us but do not take our interests as communities into account.

The Neighbourhood Plan will only be able to provide a template for distributing the levels of development that the Core Strategy lays down, and the Core Strategy, because it is slavishly wedded to the pseudo-science of trend-based projection, and is compelled by the government's continuing imposition of a requirement to show a 5 Year Land supply (each feeds off the other!), so that the Neighbourhood Plan will not really be a plan in the sense that it is Truro mapping its future – it will be a plan in which we battle to save a few fragments of our surroundings and rural economy from being overwhelmed by a tsunami of development that will not meet the needs of our community or enhance the opportunities of future generations.

Last week Mrs Newton brought Mr Powell MP to meet the Neighbourhood Plan steering group. It was a useful meeting but I could not help thinking that the degree of faith which is underpinning the so-called reforms to the planning system will be inadequate when it comes to the test – which is, how well are we able to defend ourselves against the depredations of margin-hungry developers?

The Highways Authority has launched a series of consultations on proposals for traffic management – mainly small yellow line schemes.

We are hoping to hold a Christmas Lunch and to invite members of Falmouth to join us.

I am hoping to see progress on the agreement between Cornwall Council and Truro city Council for the future management of the Coosebean area, but so far progress has been slow. I fear we must delay our expedition until the Spring, unless something happens more quickly.

The Conservation Committee remains in a degree of jeopardy, despite efforts to save it. We must be resolute and I would like to suggest we write to the CEO of Cornwall Council extolling its merits. I fear that the draconian cuts to come will render it impossible to sustain unless we find another means of administering it. May we copy our letter to the Mayor?

Lastly, you will recall that I tried to get Truro Police Station listed and was rebuffed, being told that the building was not to the original plan of the architect. I have reflected on this (for some time!) and now feel that it is pertinent to write back to English Heritage to point out that, whilst the building may not comply with the architect's original concept or plan, it has been manipulated to fit into its site, and the result remains a successful example of its style and period – in my view the best in Cornwall. What matters is the building itself, not whether it complies with the initial concept – after all, most buildings change as they go along because you find out things as you implement any project. Therefore, I would appreciate your view on whether to re-open the debate with EH by making this point.

Best wishes

Bert