

MPs back public ownership of harbour as ING project drags on

MPs have backed a campaign to bring Hayle harbour into community ownership amid claims that the £220 million project now hinges on planning permission for a town centre supermarket on South Quay.

Deputy mayor John Bennett is leading the group following concerns that Cornwall councillors will be pressured into supporting plans by harbour owners ING, or risk losing the redevelopment.

Talks to finalise planning approval for the homes and agree a financial deal to begin work are yet to produce agreement, nine months after permission was granted.

ING has admitted the supermarket deal would give the company "confidence to continue investing in the scheme" but denies the store is "make or break" for its plans.

Problems

Cllr Bennett thinks the town faces the same conservation and traffic problems as Penzance did with the Isles of Scilly ferry link, and has written an open letter proposing the formation of the Friends of Hayle Harbour.

"The harbour plans were finely balanced when we gave permission but ING has thrown out everything it consulted on with plans for a supermarket - and now all bets are off," he said.

"Councillors agonised over planning permission and I, for one, would not have voted in favour if the supermarket had been included.

"We were never against the development, we just didn't want to give away the store too

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easily."

MP Andrew George, who convened a similar takeover project 15 years ago, said he would back the campaign if there was not "the right type of progress".

Mr George is concerned that the withdrawal of public funding for infrastructure works could be used as a "crowbar" to force planners.

"There was artful use of language to pressure the community into giving planning permission for more than 1,000 houses," he said.

"You can't present elected representatives with 11th hour brinkmanship.

"If, as Cllr Bennett suggests, the ING proposals are floundering, going in the wrong direction or do not provide sufficient benefit to the community in terms of jobs etc, then his initiative is clearly something I would support."

Fellow Lib Dem MP Julia Goldsworthy, who hopes to represent Hayle after boundary changes before the next General Election, said public ownership was "definitely an option worth exploring".

"There have been too many occasions in the past where private owners have attempted to hold the community of Hayle to ransom over the future of the harbour," she added.

"This has to stop. The voice of local people must be heard and responded to."

Recently-submitted detailed plans for the South Quay supermarket did not form part of the outline planning permis-

sion granted in March.

Infrastructure works estimated at up to £20 million, including a new road and bridge onto North Quay, were originally intended to form the first phase of the development.

Detailed planning permission for the work has been granted but binding legal agreements have yet to be signed with Cornwall Council.

The Dutch company is currently in financial discussions with the South West Regional Development Agency about the split between public and private sector money required to 'unlock' the scheme and deliver a Marine Renewables business park.

Stalemate

SWRDA's director for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Theo Leijser admitted that funding cuts could hit the scheme but denied the talks were at stalemate.

Mr Leijser added that it was "inaccurate and premature" to suggest that the infrastructure plans depended on the award of planning permission for a supermarket.

A spokesman for ING said planning approval for a supermarket was "significant".

"We are getting clarification as to what the level of public sector support will be but North Quay can be run in parallel with South Quay," the spokesman said.

"Clearly the plans to build housing on North Quay will not be brought to the market until conditions are right."

Hayle Residents' Association is to hold a meeting to discuss forming the group.