

Cornish Constitutional Convention – the Next Phase

1. There are a number of important factors which will affect how we proceed in the next period.
2. With the departure of the Labour government and the arrival of the Coalition, the nature of what we can do has changed. We are probably not looking at a step-change in the governance of Cornwall & Scilly, neither a 'Devolution to Cornwall & Scilly Act' nor indeed any legislation to establish an Assembly for Cornwall & Scilly. On the other hand, we need not be facing 'no change'!
3. Cornwall Council has an agenda of its own. Although there may be coincidence of interest, it is not the same thing as the Convention. While there may be members in common, we must not spend time 'scrutinising' the council.
4. Politics – and party politics – are important. It may frustrate individuals but Cornwall Council will behave in both a political and a party political way when appropriate or deemed necessary or desirable by its members. Similarly, MPs and others will act politically and in their own partisan interest. We must not waste our time complaining at any of this – indeed, we must find a way to use it to our – and Cornwall & Scilly's – advantage.
5. We must ensure that we know the difference between constitutional matters and policy and maintain our non-policy position. Whether it's the incinerator or the future of public services, we must be clear that we do not set policy. A good example is that of constituency boundaries: how many MPs there are, in the House of Commons as a whole or simply in Cornwall & Scilly, is not a matter for the Convention; whether our border is crossed is and we can – and must – oppose that. Our aim is for Cornwall & Scilly to have sufficient powers to make those policies. Individual members of the Convention, and indeed the Steering Group, will have firmly-held views and may, in other forums, promote them but that should not happen here.
6. Similarly, ideas of a '50 Year Programme' cannot, and should not, refer to the political, economic, social or even cultural development of Cornwall & Scilly. All of those matters are intensely political: some are areas on which political parties may differ; others are areas on which cross-party policies will emerge; in either case, it is not the business of this Convention to debate, form a view on or promote any particular policies.
7. Of course, the Convention will want to adopt a position on relevant matters, such as cross-border constituencies, which affect the constitutional position of Cornwall & Scilly. But we must be careful: by far the majority of issues are not within our purview. Even issues such as the development of the Cornish language or the position of the Cornish people as a recognised 'minority' fall outside our domain. Our campaign does not rest solely on any of these issues and we must be careful not to join ourselves at the hip, so to speak, to any issue or campaign whose loss would endanger our cause.
8. So – what should we be doing, if not all those things above which I suggest are not our business? To reiterate, we seek the establishment of a democratically-elected Assembly for Cornwall & Scilly, with as many powers as are necessary to allow the people of the region to

determine their own path in their cultural, social, economic and political development. Experience in both Scotland and Wales suggests that the precise powers required will expand over time.

9. It therefore behoves us to examine the ways in which this aim may be realised. And here I return to some of the statements above. We do not have a government in Westminster which is inclined to pass laws to radically change the constitution of the state. We do have a government which may be open to suggestions on how better (by their definition of 'better') the state in Cornwall & Scilly may be run. While an Act of Parliament, underpinned by a Referendum, may be the recognised preferred way of making permanent changes to the constitution, it may be that a series of incremental changes can become sufficiently entrenched as to be, in effect, irreversible. We must, of course, bear in mind the words of Enoch Powell: *'Power devolved is power retained'*, when following this course.
10. I believe there are three areas in which the Steering Group should be active over the next year. In no particular order, they are:
 - a. Establishing strong links with and cultivating the support of a multitude of organisation in Cornwall & Scilly. I don't mean only the Stannary or parish councils, though I would not exclude them; I mean trades unions, churches and other key threads of our social fabric. This is where our individual views must be sublimated to that of the Convention: it doesn't matter what we feel about an organisation, it's its place in Cornwall & Scilly in the 21st century which is important.
 - b. Extending and maintaining our links with politicians at all levels and within all parties and none in any body which has power over or exerts influence in Cornwall & Scilly. One Unique Selling Point of the Convention is that we can do things that no other organisation may: we can tread the corridors of power in a way that patently does not threaten those in power; we must continue to do this so as not to miss any opportunity to extend the powers available to Cornwall & Scilly.
 - c. Identifying opportunities to advance our cause, even if only by a millimetre. Past examples have included the re-drawing of economic boundaries that led to Objective One funding for Cornwall. Future examples could include the involvement of Cornwall Council in passenger rail franchise decisions. We may be entering a period of drip, drip, drip enhancement of powers inside Cornwall & Scilly and we should be ready to catch every drop.
11. One final point: I do not believe that we should tie ourselves too closely with either 'the Channel Isles', and ideas of a new, wide-ranging economic region, or to the Duchy as an historical constitutional feature of Cornwall & Scilly. We must be hard-headed and focussed on the here and now. Jersey hasn't gained autonomy, it has retained it. The succession in a monarchy is either a matter of winning a war or an automatic transition – either way, no-one will ask us. The Cornish Constitutional Convention must deal with the *real-politik*, not lose itself in emotion.

Pedyr Prior, Kevardhu, 2011