

To: S.T.C. Councillors

From: Barry Brooking

A REPRESENTATION TO S.T.C. WITH REGARD TO THE PROPOSED SALTASH TOWN MARKET & A DEFENCE OF OUR BENCH

My representation is in three parts because of very recent developments/matters arising before this meeting.

Part One: F.T.C. Council Meeting 5th December 2024

Council resolved 'to relocate the memorial bench between Diamond Nails and Bandits'. I was not present at the meeting but have spoken with Councillors and members of the public who were. This decision has upset many of the Saltash public who are 'up in arms' about what they regard as an insensitive and even abusive decision showing a lack of honour to our 'fallen'. Council will be aware, and our Mayor has confirmed it, that Saltash is very supportive of remembering its own. Because I have something of a profile in Saltash regarding remembrance, I have been inundated with local people asking me to represent them in criticising that decision. I understand that many have complained passionately, probably only a fraction of those who are against the decision, especially those who lost close relatives like me. We feel insulted by the decision. Some even want to start a 'campaign', informing local and national press and media and protest with placards at the market, including 'boycotting' it in protest. I will not lead such a protest, but restrict myself to making what I hope will be a compelling case to rescind your resolution about the memorial bench being relocated.

I support our shops in Fore Street regularly, and would be delighted to support a market - but not if you take such a decision to relocate a permanent war memorial in favour of a market that will presumably be held once a month or so. I do not believe that you performed the necessary due diligence that I have done over this subject. Had you done so, I believe you would not have made such a decision, putting local commercial considerations before remembrance. There are so many important points that should have been considered at your meeting. I shall cite 10:

1. The proposed market site does not need the relocating of the bench c. 3 x 1 yard as it does not take up a significant amount of space in the area which is c. 35 x 10 yards, allowing for a pedestrian passageway next to the road.

2. The bench will take up even less of the space available if, as I hope, the market is successful, and can be expanded along Belle Vue Road or even Wesley Road.

3. The bench in question is considered by many - even Councillors - as the most popular place to meet and sit in Fore Street.

Some elderly residents say that they are grateful for its comfort in a pleasant location by providing a sitting place when they walk up Fore Street.

4. The proposed new location is not only less prominent for a memorial bench but subject to cold, northerly winds. Unsurprisingly, there are two ordinary benches nearby, which in my experience are rarely used.

5. Because of its location, a number of residents use the current memorial bench to sit and remember their loved ones who lost their lives in W.W.2. This includes the families of the 6 A.F.S. Firemen killed in action. This was the largest loss of life in one incident of the whole of the Fire Service in England and Wales in W.W.2. For me, this is personal. My grandfather was one of them. This representation is not just on behalf of those in our community who respect remembrance - but on behalf of our 15 Saltash dead.

6. The bench was one of two sited deliberately by the 1941 Blitz Committee to 'mirror' each other, together with a 'storyboard' close to where many of the Saltash 'fallen' died.

7. When installed, the benches and 'storyboard' were officially blessed as memorials. Some would consider them sacrosanct.

8. Council surely did not show enough respect by not consulting properly or doing its due diligence and research with the Saltash public or the Blitz Committee. I have been told by a member of that committee that she was told the intention was to move the bench a few feet. The proposed location is more like 30 yards.

9. Some remembrance groups use the bench and area as a focal point to meet.

10. The Council Draft Minute with regard to making space is neither logical nor consistent. It states that you do not intend to relocate the Town Council Noticeboard because of associated costs. I have taken advice about this. Apparently it will cost more to move the four-legged bench, set on two concrete blocks on paving slabs, while the Noticeboard just has two round supports set in paving slabs.

This whole matter has been managed poorly.

I believe that had Council been aware of all of these facts it would not have made a decision to relocate the bench, because it is just plain wrong. I believe that you should rescind that resolution for good and as soon as possible to save Council being brought into disrepute.

Part 2:

On 6th January 2025 the twenty or so people who complained about your decision received an email from the Town Clerk saying that 'The Report confirms that they have reconsidered the need to relocate the Blitz Memorial Bench'. We were grateful to Mrs Burrows to know about this - up to a point. We still believe that what is being proposed is unacceptable to those of us who have a passion for remembrance. We want the bench kept 'in situ' as originally sited. The report says the Town Team will review the future of the bench 'during the six month period of the trial'. That is surely not precise enough. In any case, if we apply more logic, if the market is successful as we all hope, then the bench space will not have affected it adversely. If the market is unsuccessful then the market will close, and the issue of the bench will not be relevant. Should you go along with this new proposal and a future move be made to relocate the bench, we shall use the same arguments to oppose it. Council and the Town Team will now be aware of the facts.

The Town Team has now suggested that the new 'square' could be used for other small events etc. Presumably if they are small then the bench should not be a problem. Other locations could be Victoria Gardens or Alexandra Square.

Part 3:

At the end of Rattigan's play 'The Winslow Boy' his barrister affirms 'Let Right be Done'. Surely the right and reasonable thing for Council and the Town Team to do now is to put an end to any proposal to relocate the memorial bench once and for all, because its position and whom it represents is so important to so many of us in the Saltash community. In doing so, you would comply with the Nolan principles regarding acting in the public interest, impartially, fairly and on merit, submitting to public scrutiny, accountability, transparency and respect for the public. I do hope that you make the right decision over this important and sensitive matter.

Barry Brooking