



THE SMUGGLER

A personal look at Ilfracombe life

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■ TOURIST ATTRACTION: Tunnels Beaches.

At last our planners see sense over beach

SOME goings on in Ilfracombe really are no laughing matter and at this present moment it is with particular reference to Jamie McLintock, the owner of Tunnel Beaches. These tunnels are a truly unique experience providing access to a beautiful area of coastline and coves.

The large tidal pool is a delight to children, who can enjoy their various inflatable devices and snorkel away to their heart's content in total safety while parents sit comfortably only yards away.

With stunning views of Lundy and South Wales to appreciate and an abundance of rock pools to explore it is one of Ilfracombe's must-see attractions.

So why has Jamie had such a hard time of it?

It wasn't that long ago when he first ran up against the small-minded planners from Barnstaple, who seem to be intent on ruining every suggested improvement in Ilfracombe.

He wanted to put some poles up, with fluttering adverts for his newly-acquired business.

It just so happens that one of these was a much coveted Blue Flag denoting the cleanliness of his beaches to European standards, which is something we should all applaud.

Naturally planning permission was refused — the reason being they might be a distraction to passing motorists!

How many car drivers have crashed into Windsor Castle, for example, just

because there was a couple of flags flying from the turrets?

Come to that how many people have had a fatal collision outside the United Nations Building in New York and there are about 70 flags fluttering there.

Just another case of the petty, mean-minded attitudes from those who are supposed to be helping us and, not to put too fine a point on it, the very people who thought the 'Cooling Towers' were a good idea. Still, time passes and the world moves on. The flags eventually went up to the delight of us all and since then Jamie has poured his heart and soul into Tunnel Beaches and made many an improvement. It really is one of our major attractions now and he deserves all the credit. Of course it's a business but it is a refreshing change to see somebody investing a little effort into a concern in Ilfracombe, instead of just taking all the time.

So, now we come to the latest epic struggle he has had with the planning office. They have fought tooth and nail to prevent the latest improvements to his life's work. Out came all the same excuses: 'over-intensification of the site,' or 'visual impact from the coast line,' and 'out of keeping with the ethos of the town.'

They're having a laugh surely. A well-considered and sensitive development, including a toilet facility for his patrons, within the

boundaries of the beach, was an eminently sensible idea. It had the backing of Ilfracombe Town Council and the support of just about everyone I have spoken to about it. Still our local planning department was obdurate. Can't have it, won't have it, they shouted.

Ultimately, a smattering of commonsense prevailed and the councillors at North Devon District decided to have a proper look at the enterprise in question and this happened last Tuesday.

Mind you, the planning department had not given up all hope and wheeled out some seriously big guns for the occasion, including environmentalists, who took a trip out to sea.

Of course one of their biggest apprehensions would seem to be the fear that somebody in Ilfracombe might actually do something to make the place more of an attraction. I have no doubt our local elected representatives thoroughly enjoyed their little jaunt around our coastline, but this would have been somewhat spoiled by the incessant waffling they had to endure about 'coastal impact' and 'environmental effect' from their planning department and associated tree huggers. However, the very next day, Jamie received his planning consent by a massive majority of 17-5 in favour! Hooray for a bit of commonsense I say. Hooray to NDDC, who saw the sense of the whole enterprise and

a big BOO to the grey and faceless bureaucrats who are more frightened of making a logical decision than they are of their own shadows.

Bearing all this in mind, isn't it about time that somebody at NDDC had a quiet word in the shell-like ears of the grey ones who inhabit the planning department and told them to at least have the courage of their own convictions and stopped reading through John Prescott's advisory pamphlets.

After all, I do believe he has now relinquished his office so just once in a while it would be nice to know these people were capable of making a value judgement of their own accord, rather than thumbing through page after page of documents issued by a department that is now defunct.

The first phase of Jamie's projected improvements, which include the café and play area, amazingly accepted by the 'grey ones,' commences this year and by the end of next year all the new improvements will be on the cards for everyone of us to enjoy.

That means we locals as well as the tourist base this major renovation will no doubt attract.

Also, as it happens and just as an aside, Tunnel Beaches has just come in at No3 in the whole country from the BBC Wildlife magazine's top ten best spots to go rock-pooling in the UK.

Surely this must mean something for us. Could it be that this unprecedented accolade had some influence on the decision made? I would like to think so.



■ EPIC STRUGGLE:
Jamie McLintock.