

COUNCIL – 22ND APRIL 2021

QUESTIONS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

1. **Question submitted by Councillor Lewis to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Maher)**

Subject: Utilised Services

Has the council ever, directly or indirectly, contracted with or used the services of any of the following companies:

- Safety Support Consultants Limited
- SSC Utilities Limited
- SSC Management Group Limited
- SSC Regeneration Limited
- SSC Utilities Limited
- Safety Support Consultants

Response:

“No”

2. **Question submitted by Councillor Howard to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing (Councillor Hardy)**

Subject: Sandway Homes

“What effect, if any, has the pandemic had on the viability and future of the Council owned development company, Sandway Homes? What benefits do we expect to see from Sandway and when do we expect to see them?”

Response:

Effect of the pandemic

The company paused operations in March 2020 as construction activities were constrained by government restrictions and the Board decided that some time was required to assess the risks to the future of the business.

The plan put in place had 2 principal stages:

Stage 1: ‘Prepare for Recovery’ - March 2020 to May 2020 - completing non-construction (low cost) activities such as completing planning applications and agreeing terms for contracts with the builder, the housing association partner (for affordable housing) and the sales agent.

Stage 2: 'Pause' (before construction) - March 2020 to Aug 2020 - carefully monitoring the UK economy and housing market to assess if and when it was appropriate to move to major spend construction activities.

Based on positive assessments from careful monitoring of the market conditions, the Board made the decision to progress to construction in August 2020.

As a result, Sandway's Phase 1 programme of housing development (148 units on 3 sites) was delayed by the Pandemic between March 2020 and August 2020.

Sandway has continued to closely monitor market conditions, but these have continued to improve and sales values continued to increase so there has been no further requirement to pause operations and work continues at pace.

(Market data compiled for the March 2021 update, sales values have increased over the last 12 months by 5.2%, nationally, and by 6.5% in the North West. Buyer demand was also showing a 34% increase nationally, with a 40% increase in the volume of new mortgage approvals).

Market insights from experts in the field predict buyer interest to remain high, modest value growth to continue, and an uplift in the number of houses sold in 2021.

Other major housebuilders have continued to deliver robust performance in 2020, despite the challenges of the pandemic, are continuing with their land acquisition programmes and with confidence that the housing market outlook will remain positive and resilient.

When will benefits be received?

With the decision to resume full operational activity in August 2020, Sandway has progressed Phase 1 with the following milestones having been achieved:

- Planning has been approved for the first two sites:
 - Sandy Brook (adjacent to Meadow Lane), Ainsdale: A development of 48 two-, three- and four-bedroom houses, of which 33 will be sold on the open market, with the remaining 15 being purchased by a Registered Provider and offered as a mix of Affordable Rent and Shared Ownership.
 - Hey Farm Gardens (adjacent to Barton's Close), Crossens: A development of 30 two-, three- and four-bedroom houses, 20 of which will be sold on the open market, with the remaining 10 being purchased by a Registered Provider and offered as a mix of Affordable Rent and Shared Ownership.
- Infrastructure works commenced at Sandy Brook and Hey Farm Gardens in December 2020.
- Housebuilding works will start at Sandy Brook and Hey Farm Gardens from May 2021.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'Off-plan' marketing of properties at these 2 sites has already commenced with more than a dozen enquiries received to-date and 2 reservation fees already taken. ▪ Planning is expected to be approved in June 2021 for the 3rd site, Sefton Grange (on land adjacent to Buckley Hill Lane): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sefton Grange is a development of 70 units - 52 two, three and four bedrooms houses and 18 one- and two-bedroom apartments in 2 buildings. ▪ The council is considering one of these apartment buildings for the provision of council housing. ▪ The company is forecasting that at the completion of Phase 1, by June 2023, the dividend to the council forecast in the Cabinet approved Business Case for Sandway Homes will have been delivered in full. ▪ By this time, it is also now forecast that the Full Business Case benefit to the council (including the dividend but also all other benefits such as Best Consideration market value capital receipts for the sale of the land; S106 contributions; increased council tax; interest on the commercial loan; and payments made to the council by the company for support services), will have very significantly exceeded the target set in the Business Case approved by Cabinet. ▪ Other benefits that will have been achieved by the completion of Phase 1 include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delivering new revenue to the Council that can be reinvested in Council services. ▪ Contributing to the Borough's 2030 Vision of 11,000 new homes, with 148 homes delivered during Phase 1 ▪ A robust business plan for a Phase 2 with an aspiration to have delivered a total of c500 new homes over 10 years. ▪ Creation of new employment opportunities within the region. ▪ A significant contribution to the creation of communities that are open respectful and resilient. ▪ The delivery of housing in a way that supports ethical and environmental standards in housing specification and construction".
3.	<p><u>Question submitted by Councillor Watson CBE to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Maher)</u></p>
	<p>Subject: Red Telephone Boxes Outside of Southport Town Hall</p>
	<p>(a) Is the Leader of the Council aware that the two iconic red telephone boxes outside Southport Town Hall are due to be sold by auction at the end of the month?</p> <p>(b) Does he agree with me that these iconic structures should be refurbished, repainted and made secure as they form an important part of our heritage?</p>

	(c) Would he confirm that he will contact immediately those responsible for seeking to sell off this important historical asset and to investigate ways in which some element of Council funding perhaps through some of the amounts available from the old Southport Area Committee budgets form part of a financial package?
	Response:
	(a) “Yes, I am aware of the auction listing. The telephone boxes were sold by BT (for a nominal fee) to a national charity in 2014. This charity is now looking to sell those boxes”.
	(b) “The telephone boxes are listed on Heritage England’s protected register and, as such, whoever owns them is responsible for their upkeep in line with their historical value”.
	(c) Given the structures are protected already as a heritage asset and any change of use would require consideration by our planning team, I do not consider that there is any detriment to the structures by the auction at this time, as they cannot be removed and must be maintained by any owner in line with their listing on Heritage England’s protected register”.
4.	Question submitted by Councillor Watson CBE to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Maher)
	Subject: Sefton Council Wage and Salary Figures
	Would the Leader of the Council please advise the cost of a 10% increase for all Sefton employees to include National Insurance and Pension Fund contributions.
	Response:
	“The additional cost of a 10% pay award on the Council’s budget would be in the region of £11m (excluding externally funded posts and those posts funded by schools). This includes the increased cost of National Insurance and pension contributions. This is a cost that we would, of course, expect Government to fund in its entirety.”
5.	Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Cabinet Member for Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services (Councillor Lappin)
	Subject: Victoria Park, Southport
	The vast majority of Victoria Park, Southport, of which Sefton MBC holds the freehold, is presently being used as a 'temporary caravan park'. The use does not appear to be in connection with supporting any specific event.
	Could the Cabinet Member inform the Council what the ratio of facilities on this site is per 'temporary' (sic) occupant or caravan for: (a) male and female toilet cubicles; and (b) wash basins - and thence state whether the sanitation facilities available for the caravanners meets with requirements for such operation, with particular reference to the amount of time that caravanners will be allowed to stay on this 'temporary' (sic) site?

	Response
	“The use of the site for the purposes of camping/caravanning does not need to support a specific event. As the site does not require planning permission, there are no planning requirements to ensure acceptable sanitary facilities are provided on site. The Environmental Health Manager is looking into this further”.
6.	Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing (Councillor Moncur)
	Subject: Tree Planting
	<p>Could the Cabinet Member inform the Council:</p> <p>(a) how many trees have been planted within the boundaries of the Borough by the Council and/or its agents either since January 1st 2021 or any other longer period of the Council's choosing?</p> <p>(b) for the same period, how many street trees and park trees have been substantially felled within the boundaries of the Borough by the Council and/or its agents either since January 1st 2021 or any other longer period of the Council's choosing (i.e. the same period)?</p>
	Response
	<p>(a) Tree Planting Season Nov 2020 - March 2021</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highway Tree Planting : 207 • Park Tree Planting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ woodland style 3200 ▪ standard nursery size of tree: 23 <p>Total: 3430</p> <p>(b) Tree removals between Nov 2020 - March 2021</p> <p>Highway Tree removals: 98 Park Tree removals: 62</p> <p>Total: 160</p>
7.	Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Maher)
	Subject: Burscough Curves
	In connection with (a) the proposed restoration of the 'Burscough Curves'; and (b) the threatened withdrawal of direct train services between Southport and Manchester Piccadilly/Manchester Oxford Road stations; what contacts have been made by the Member of Parliament for Southport with Sefton MBC seeking involvement by or support from the Council?

	Response				
	<p>"I understand that the Member of Parliament for Southport did make contact with the Chief Executive of Sefton Council regarding the pursuit of funding for the Burscough Curves project several months ago, and that the subject has been discussed by the Southport Town Deal board, of which both are members.</p> <p>I am not aware of any contact seeking involvement or support with regards to the Manchester rail consultation".</p>				
8.	Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control (Councillor Veidman)				
	Subject: Number of New Houses in Borough				
	<p>How many Housing units have been (a) completed and (b) started within the Borough's boundaries during the present financial year (or any other substantial period of the Council's choosing) on (i) Greenfield and (ii) Brownfield sites?</p> <p>How many affordable home' housing units (for sale or rent) have been (a) completed and (b) started within the Borough's boundaries during the present financial year (or any other substantial period of the Council's choosing)?</p>				
	Response				
	<p>"Please note dwelling starts are not consistently reported to Sefton Building Control so the table below focus on dwelling completions for the two most recent financial years.</p>				
	2019/20	Affordable?			
	Land Type	N	Y	Total dwellings	
	not entered	36		36	
	B	524	142	666	
	G	108	40	148	
		668	182	850	
	2020/21	Affordable?			
	Land Type	N	Y	not entered	Total Dwellings
	B	119	41		160
	G	60	28	5	93
		179	69	5	253
	<p>Note these are provisional figures as the search for start and completion dates does not commence until after 1 Apr and after all planning approvals have been entered for the previous year".</p>				
9.	Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Maher)				
	Subject: Victoria Park, Southport				
	<p>The vast majority of Victoria Park, Southport, of which Sefton MBC holds the freehold, is presently being used as a 'temporary caravan park'. The use does not appear to be in connection with supporting any specific event.</p>				

	<p>Could the Leader inform the Council:</p> <p>(a) when this use commenced?</p> <p>(b) how many caravans are (maximum) allowed onto this 'temporary site'?</p> <p>(c) how long the 'temporary use' is expected to, and sanctioned by the Council as freeholder to, continue?</p> <p>(d) when the Council as freeholder was first consulted about this use - and which Officer or Cabinet Member gave approval for this use, either indefinite or time-restricted - and when was this decision taken?</p>
	<p>Response</p>
	<p>a) "It is my understanding that part of Victoria Park is occupied at various times throughout the year as a temporary caravan site for recreational purposes. The most recent period is between 21st April to 19th May 2021. We were made aware of this.</p> <p>b) There is no limit in planning terms, nor within the existing lease.</p> <p>c) Planning Services were made aware that this period of use is expected to endure from 21st April to 19th May 2021.</p> <p>There is no equivalent requirement to notify the Council as freeholder on the occasion of every such use.</p> <p>d) As above".</p> <p>"It is a shame that whilst the hotels are still unable to open, the alternative of caravans providing visitor accommodation and visitor numbers as a viable alternative to supporting local businesses and facilities has not been recognised in the question".</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p>Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Building Control (Councillor Veidman)</p>
	<p>Subject: Victoria Park, Southport</p>
	<p>The vast majority of Victoria Park, Southport, of which Sefton MBC holds the freehold, is presently being used as a 'temporary caravan park'. The use does not appear to be in connection with supporting any specific event.</p> <p>Could the Cabinet Member inform the Council:</p> <p>(a) whether the Planning Department is aware of this use; when it was made aware of the use; what date it was given for the start of this use; and how long it was informed this use was going to be continuing?</p> <p>(b) whether the department believes that this use requires planning permission: if not, could the Cabinet Member explain how the Department believes the use to be covered by other planning permission?</p>

	<p>(c) how many caravans does the Planning Department believe are (i) (maximum) allowed onto this 'temporary site' and (ii) presently on site?</p> <p>(d) how long has the Planning Department been informed that this use is expected to continue for and whether the planning department believes its approval for use of such a length of time require planning permission?</p> <p>(e) in terms of planning issues, what sanitation facilities are required for the operation of a large caravan site with the present numbers of caravans in occupation and use and how do the facilities currently available to the caravanners on Victoria Park meet those requirements?</p>
	<p>Response</p>
	<p>a) Planning Services are aware that part of Victoria Park is occupied at various times throughout the year as a temporary caravan site for recreational purposes. The most recent period is between 21st April to 19th May 2021, having been made aware of this on 8th April 2021.</p> <p>b) Part 5, Class A of the Town and Country Planning General Permitted Development Order permits the use of land as a caravan site subject to the provisions of paragraphs 2 to 10 of Schedule 1 of the Caravan Act 1960 (cases where a caravan site licence is not required).</p> <p>Paragraph 4 of Schedule 1 of the Caravan Act 1960 states:</p> <p><i>Sites occupied and supervised by exempted organisations Subject to the provisions of paragraph 13 of this Schedule, a site licence shall not be required for the use as a caravan site of land which is occupied by an organisation which holds for the time being a certificate of exemption granted under paragraph 12 of this Schedule (hereinafter referred to as an exempted organisation) if the use is for purposes of recreation and is under the supervision of the organisation.</i></p> <p>The site is occupied and supervised by the Camping and Caravanning Club who are an exempted organisation under paragraph 4. This type of exemption would allow an organisation to occupy a site for the purpose of recreation. Organisations holding this type of exemption have considerable freedoms in arranging and supervising caravan site facilities. They do not require express planning permission or a site licence from a local authority nor is there a limit to their occupation of a site. It is, therefore, expected that holders of paragraph 4 exemption certificates acknowledge that the freedoms they enjoy implicitly carry certain responsibilities. In particular, it is agreed with the major caravan organisations, including The Association of Caravan and Camping Exempted Organisations (ACCEO), that an organisation would be expected to limit its occupation of a site to no more than 28 days on the site, at any one time.</p> <p>c) (i) There is no limit in planning terms. (ii) According to the notification from the Caravan Club, it is understood that there would be up to a maximum of 100 units (tents and caravans) per night between the period 21st April and 19th May 2021.</p> <p>d) As above, it is understood that the site would be used for 28 days in line with time period recommended in the exemption.</p>

The Council, however, have been notified of other periods throughout this year and next which would see the park used for similar purposes for further periods, all of which are within the 28 days. As explained, the temporary use of the site does not require planning permission. Although the exemption expects occupation to not exceed 28 days for each occasion, it does not prevent multiple occasions throughout the calendar year - i.e. the site could be used for 28 days on separate occasions throughout the year without the need for planning permission.

e) As the development does not require planning permission, there are no planning requirements to ensure acceptable sanitary facilities are provided on site. The Environmental Health Manager is looking into this further”.