

COUNCIL – 6 SEPTEMBER 2012

QUESTIONS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

1. Question submitted by Councillor Papworth to the Leader of the Council (Councillor P. Dowd)

Could it please be confirmed that the three parties represented on this Council agree that:

- (a) Any proposal to build on the Green Belt is entirely unacceptable, and
- (b) Given that Sefton's population is forecast to continue to decline, the notion that we require extra housing is absurd.

Response:

I very much appreciate the concerns expressed in the question but regrettably the Coalition Government's imposition of planning laws has put the green belt and green space under severe threat. But never one for half measures, the Chancellor has indicated that even more draconian attacks to the green belt and green space are on the way apparently in the name of economic recovery. In this respect, I'm afraid the question is best addressed to your Tory and Liberal Democrat colleagues in Westminster rather than me.

2. Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Cabinet Member – Regeneration and Tourism (Councillor Maher)

What is the Council's estimate of the cost of restoring the damaged tiling/paving and balustrades in front of the Town Hall and Atkinson Centre, Southport to a reasonable condition?

Response:

The paved area in front of Southport Town Hall & the Atkinson Centre was installed 14 years ago (in 1998) and since that time general wear & tear, water seepage, frost and vehicle damage has resulted in approximately one third of the white limestone paving suffering some cracking and spalling.

The paving has been recently inspected and whilst it is somewhat aesthetically displeasing it does not present a safety hazard.

The approximate cost of replacing one third of the white limestone with new, reasonably matched, material would be in the order of £20,000. Replacing all of the white limestone and regrouting the whole area would cost approximately £60,000. There is no budget provision available to undertake this work at the present time. The darker green/slate paving is a harder material and is generally in a good condition and does not require any significant repair or restoration.

The whole Princess Diana gardens area, including the paving, balustrades and walls, is scheduled for a power wash in October which will remove most to the discolouration and dirt that these materials accumulate over time.

3. Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Cabinet Member – Children, Schools, Families and Leisure (Councillor Moncur)

In the past year, on how many occasions has the Council, as freeholder, been approached and/or granted permission for the culling of rabbits on any part of the Birkdale Site of Scientific Interest and, if so, what methods has the Council approved for such activity?

Response:

None.

4. Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Cabinet Member – Children, Schools, Families and Leisure (Councillor Moncur)

What is the current 'spare place' position for admissions to each year of each infant, junior and secondary school in Southport and Formby?

Response:

The question really requires a detailed response which I have asked Officers to provide directly to Cllr Dawson.

In summary, however, for the 9 Formby schools and 25 Southport schools the total numbers of surplus places per year group are:

	Formby	Southport
Reception	26	25
Y1	1	35
Y2	31	22
Y3	26	79
Y4	20	46
Y5	30	61
Y6	19	83
Y7	58	153
Y8	3	100
Y9	0	84
Y10	0	52
Y11	0	1

5. Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Cabinet Member – Children, Schools, Families and Leisure (Councillor Moncur)

Is it possible and/or likely that the hoarding around Southport's Atkinson Centre construction compound, which is obscuring the western entrance to the Cambridge Arcade, may be removed or minimised before the Christmas shopping season commences at the beginning of November?

Response:

Yes.

6. Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Cabinet Member – Children, Schools, Families and Leisure (Councillor Moncur)

What was the purpose behind workmen being sent onto the eastern bank of Rotten Row, Southport, recently to remove the heads of wildflowers?

Response:

To remove Oxford Ragwort from the long grass on the embankment on the east side of Rotten Row. Oxford Ragwort is a noxious weed which spreads quickly by seed and is an invasive species which will take over the embankment and infest adjacent borders and gardens unless kept under control.

7. Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor P. Dowd)

What projections does Sefton MBC have for reduction of overall net carbon output for the future, in activities over which it has direct control and through the schools which it advises?

Response:

The Council's second Carbon Management Plan 2011 has set targets to reduce carbon emissions from all Council operations, including schools, by 25% to 2016: equivalent to a reduction of 8,927 tonnes of carbon.

8. Question submitted by Councillor Preece to the Cabinet Member – Transportation (Councillor Fairclough)

Why is the vehicle speed, which sets off the new speed reminder signs on Southport's Coast Road, set far closer to 60mph than to the speed limit on that road which is 50mph?

Response:

The four Vehicle Actuated Signs (VASs) on the Coastal Road are set to trigger at an approach speed of 55mph.

The trigger speed can be altered to whatever speed is considered appropriate. In this particular location, we know that the 85th percentile speed along the Coastal Road is close to 50mph. (The 85th percentile speed is the speed at which 85% of traffic travels at or below).

If the trigger speed had been set at 50mph this would mean the signs would be activated by virtually every vehicle, which for a significant proportion of the day would result in the sign being continuously illuminated.

The whole idea behind VASs is that they flash only when necessary, i.e. when a driver is driving **over** the speed limit. A continuously illuminated sign would be no more effective than any of the existing static 50mph repeater signs located along the route and its impact would therefore be seriously reduced.

9. Question submitted by Councillor Byrom to the Cabinet Member – Children, Schools, Families and Leisure (Councillor Moncur)

In the light of the recent interest shown at the Southport Area Committee can the Cabinet Member Children, Schools, Families and Leisure please advise me of his views on the scrub clearance and winter sheep grazing within the Ainsdale and Birkdale Nature Reserve and on the management of the internationally important Sefton coast in general and Southport beach in particular?

Response:

The Sefton Coast is a part of the Natura 2000 European network of important wildlife sites and the work Sefton Council delivers with its partners is carried out to ensure our coast continues to be as important a natural habitat in the future as it is now and is in a better condition for future generations to enjoy.

Following extensive consultation, a Nature Conservation Strategy for the designated sites on the coast was published in 2009: scrub management and grazing have always been elements of this coast-wide strategy.

The Ainsdale and Birkdale Sandhills Local Nature Reserve forms a major part of the Sefton Coast Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), together with the Sefton Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Ribble and Alt Estuaries Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ribble and Alt Estuaries Ramsar site.

The Council has a statutory duty to undertake habitat restoration and management works, including scrub clearance and grazing, on the Ainsdale and Birkdale Sandhills Local Nature Reserve. These works were subject to two extensive consultations which eventually resulted in the agreement of the Council's Environmental Higher Level Stewardship Agreement (HLS) with Natural England.

The management and restoration approach for these designated sites is supported by national experts and agencies and it is clearly considered to be appropriate by Natural England, who having recently reviewed the HLS agreement, accept and require that large animal grazing and scrub clearance programmes must take place if the habitat is to achieve a "favourable and recovering condition". As part of this review, Natural England have also specified that while the overall area subject to large animal grazing will remain the same, the fencing to that area can be reduced to the perimeter only and the number of internal paddock areas can therefore be reduced from seven to two.

Southport beach is an estuarine coast that has been subject to continuous change for many thousands of years and these natural processes will of course continue long into the future. Attempting to manipulate a process that is occurring naturally has proven to be ineffective in the past.

A history of beach vegetation management from the 1970's was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Environmental Services) at its meeting on 20 March 2012. That report included a chronology of previous reports to various Council Committees and detailed the numerous attempts at treatment and the associated costs.

The report to Overview and Scrutiny (Regeneration and Environmental Services) also explained natural changes to Southport Beach as it moves seaward and the process of sand dune or salt-marsh development. The key message in the report was that maintaining a beach free of vegetation is not a viable option – the options being either salt-marsh or sand dunes. As sand dunes are the more preferred option, there is a need to work in harmony with the natural processes to promote the sand dunes.

The most recent report to the Cabinet Member (Leisure and Tourism) in March 2009 identified that the Coast and Countryside Service continues to undertake manual small-scale removal of *Spartina* shoots on the main beach area at Southport. This small-scale management of vegetation is now becoming more difficult to achieve due to the impact of reductions in Council resources for the Coast and Countryside Service of approximately 50% over the last five years.

Sefton Council is recognised as a national leader in coastal management and considerable expert information is available to guide the decision making process where it relates to the foreshore. The Council's beach management methods are considered best practice nationally.

I welcome the recent commitment of Natural England to undertake a programme of engagement with interested local groups to help them understand the 'coastal processes' and the work being undertaken to restore these habitats to a "favourable recovering condition". It is only by achieving a wider understanding of the balance between amenity and conservation that we will be able to encourage our beaches and nature reserves to be used and enjoyed by the public in harmony with the protection and restoration of these internationally important habitats.

10. Question submitted by Councillor Brodie-Browne to the Leader of the Council (Councillor P. Dowd)

Can the Leader confirm the arrangements he has put in place for Councillors serving on One Vision Housing to answer questions?

Response:

Further to the response I gave to the similar question submitted by Councillor Brodie-Browne at the last meeting of the Council on 5 July, I have asked the Chief Executive to produce a report in relation to the whole issue of governance arrangements between the Council and One Vision Housing. I expect that this report will go to the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Performance in due course.

11. Question submitted by Councillor Brodie-Browne to the Cabinet Member – Older People and Health (Councillor Cummins)

Can the Cabinet Member comment on the late issuing of bills for home care which are reported to be several months in arrears? This is causing elderly users of the service concerns.

Response:

I do recognise and apologise that bills for certain adult services are subject to delay. This situation has arisen for a number of reasons:-

- Staffing difficulties within the Financial Assessment Team in Adult Social Care.
- The Council has taken on responsibility for new functions in relation to the billing for Community Meals provision.
- There has been some delay in receiving the information from providers of service.

- Technical issues that have been experienced within the Team.

It will be recognised that the nature of these charges reflect considerable changes that take place in certain packages of care on a weekly basis and hence the charges to be billed. As I have already said I do apologise for this position and we anticipate bringing all the current arrears up to date over the next 8 weeks. I will personally monitor the situation over the coming weeks to ensure this position is addressed.

12. Question submitted by Councillor Crabtree to the Leader of the Council (Councillor P. Dowd)

Would the Leader of the Council and political colleagues join the Conservative Group in congratulating all our athletes who have represented their country so brilliantly in both the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Will he agree that in the presence of the Mayor we hold a reception for those athletes, and their immediate families, who are from Sefton. We would also like to thank the Sefton Council Officers who organised the torch events bring the Games into our local communities.

Response:

I am delighted to congratulate all those athletes who have taken part in both sets of Games. I'm sure I speak for the whole of the Council when I say that we are all very proud of their commitment and achievements in the field of sport. I am more than happy to pass on the request to His Worship the Mayor to hold a reception for the athletes and their families. I agree that Sefton Council officers did a sterling job on behalf of the Council and I would like to thank them for that.