

CABINET MEMBER UPDATE REPORT		
Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
Ian Maher	Cabinet Member Regeneration & Tourism	May 2013

1. Housing Market Renewal – General

Klondyke

Construction of new homes on the Phase 1 site has commenced. This involves 86 new housing units, 17 of which will be for affordable rent. The first completed handover properties should take place circa August.

There are currently only 4 occupied properties in Phases 2 & 3. There is ongoing liaison to try to encourage these residents to move temporarily, however, most have indicated that they are not interested in doing so. All are waiting for permanent rehousing, and some want to wait for a new-build home on the Phase 1 site.

There is ongoing visits and monitoring of security in the area.

A judicial review on the need for an environmental impact assessment on the demolition of the Springwell Chapel was heard in the High Court for the 27th November following action taken by Save Britain's Heritage. We still await the outcome verdict.

This will delay the submission of Bellways planning application for Phase 2/3 area, which will also need to be considered for an environmental screening. Bellway have prepared a new layout proposal for Phases 2 and 3, with a view to seeking Planning Consent, in the coming months.

Bedford/Queens

Construction of the Phase 2 site continues. The use of Regional Growth Funding to fund the development of Bedford Queens Phase 3, and St Winefrides sites has been approved by BIS. We have entered into a tri-partite agreement with Keepmoat and Liverpool CC [as Accountable Body] to allow a scheme to begin in the coming months. There is a current planning application for the St Winifreds site.

2. Housing Market Renewal Transition Fund

Following a High Court hearing on the 18th September, Save Britain's Heritage won the right to a judicial review hearing into the allocation of Transition Funding. The Judicial Review was due to be heard in January 2013. However, the Secretary of State has conceded that the funding decision was unlawful, and a settlement will be made out of court. This should NOT lead to any action to try to reclaim the Transition Grant.

3. Housing Options Service

The Local Authority partners have begun to conduct a Review of the common Property Pool Plus Allocations Policy. Revisions of the policy will be reported to Members of each LA, for approval in due course.

Chartered Institute of Housing Consultancy have been appointed to undertake the task of Reviewing our Homeless Services and production of a new Homeless Strategy. The Homelessness Act (2002) requires every Council to review and produce a new Homeless Strategy every 5 years. Consultations with partner agencies, has begun. We hope a new Strategy will be in place by July.

Members have agreed to the Lease disposal of Windsor House, Southport, former Homeless hostel, to Forum HA, who will utilise the building to provide low level supported accommodation for young single people.

The number of clients approaching the service for help, especially single people, has increased over the last year or so, and there is little likelihood of this increase slowing over the coming months and years. This increase in homelessness has been mirrored across the other Merseyside LA's who are also reporting an increase or at least no further reductions in presentations. CLG report a 6% increase in homelessness, nationally, over the last year.

We have also seen a year-on-year increase in the number of people Rough Sleeping in the Borough despite the introduction of the No Second Night Out project. However, numbers are relatively small, increasing from 4 cases in 2010, to 7 in 2012.

The Council receives a Homeless prevention grant as part of it's annual funding settlement (circa £88,000). We have used the vast majority of this money to fund Light for Life (L4L) to provide the Southport Housing Advice Centre service. The Council has entered into a contract with Light for Life for these services, which ended at the 31st of March. Members have approved an extension this for a further 6 months, but beyond this, the service will be the subject of the Council wide Voluntary/Community/Faith sector review.

Between April and October 2012, L4L dealt with 1,108 customers seeking housing assistance, many of whom would be seeking help to find accommodation. In the vast majority of cases, L4L have service interventions to prevent or alleviate the homeless issue, helping to fulfil the Council's duties.

4 Private Sector Housing Standards Service

The Housing Standards Team have both an enforcement and advisory role dealing with Private Sector Landlords, tenants and owner occupiers. The Council has a legal duty to take action where a Category 1 Hazard (most serious hazard) exists. The Housing Standards Team has removed Category 1 hazards from 225 homes over the past 2 years, using various actions. The vast majority of those are privately rented premises. There has been a significant increase in the demand for the service of the team.

The 2011/12 financial year saw an increase in service request demand on the previous year of 42%, and this year (2012/13) we are on target to receive a similar or slightly greater level of demand as last year. This increase in demand has surpassed the national increase in demand, which was reported by the charity Shelter in Oct 2012, at an increase of 30% over the previous year.

In Sefton the number of people renting from private landlords has increased from 8,911 in the 2001 census (7.6%) to 15,804 (13.4%) in the 2011 census. This increase will certainly account for some of the rise in the number of clients requesting our team's service.

The (2009) Private Sector Housing Strategy includes an objective to set up a (voluntary) Landlord Accreditation scheme in Sefton. On 31st October, Cabinet approved 'one-off' funding, to help establish a scheme and operate it, for a 12 month period. Approval was given to appoint Wirral Council to do this for us. A project plan has been agreed and we hope a scheme will be agreed and set up and launched by June. However, due to their own budget cuts, the Wirral officers involved have been issued with 'at risk' letters, which casts a doubt on their ability to assist us beyond July.

There is continued focus on dealing with empty homes, with staff taking enforcement actions on long term empty homes.

Riverside Housing have received funding under an empty homes initiative; 'Clusters of Empty Homes'. They will be seeking to purchase, repair and then sell 18 properties under their Own-Place scheme in the Knowsley Rd & Peel Rd area of Bootle. Officers are helping to identify suitable properties.

A further round of £300m Government funding for empty homes was announced in December. Housing associations and community groups were able to bid for funding before the closing date of 25th March. Only Plus-Dane HA have indicated that they have submitted a bid for properties in Sefton.

5. Home Improvements Team and DFGs

The council have approved a capital budget of circa £2.5m for 2012-13. In addition the Govt announced an additional sum of £377,000 for DFGs in this year.

Part of the service used to be provided via an agency agreement with Mears Ltd (who took over Anchor Trust in 2010). Due to the costs involved the Council agreed that it would be more cost effective to bring the services in-house. The service came in-house with effect from the 1st of March. This will deliver a £39,000 revenue saving in 2013-14. The Councils Minor Adaptations service will also be managed within this service area.

6. Housing Strategy

David Adamson consultants have been appointed to undertake a borough wide Private sector housing stock condition survey. This will involve the survey of circa 1200 randomly selected privately owned properties across the borough.

The work has been procured jointly with Wirral council, to generate some efficiencies for both Authorities. Letters have been sent to selected householders. However, to date there has been a high rate of refusing access to surveyors. If Members are approached by residents about this survey, it would be helpful if they could encourage residents to participate in it.

Officers are beginning to review the Council's Empty Homes Strategy, with a view to bringing forward a revised strategy by the end of the year.

The Council has been successful in its application for circa £300,000 of funding from the HCA, to improve the Council's Gypsy & Traveller site at Formby. Work will involve upgrading the utility blocks [for bathing and laundry] and hopefully the addition of 4 family pitches within the site, to meet growing demand.

7. Kew Housing and Employment Site

David Wilson Homes are continuing with ground investigations and other background works to determine the final construction requirements for the site and in turn final budget costs. These will take a further 3-4 months. Current indications are that the long term development costs as initially estimated will be as anticipated with no additional costs for ground remediation. The Council should, as a result, achieve the projected levels of Affordable Housing and may even have the opportunity to alter upwards some of these figures.

The issuing of the Planning Approval for the site still remains tied to the completion of a Section 106 Agreement. Discussions between the various parties are ongoing and these expect to be resolved in May.

There is now a continuing dialogue with the partner developer for the commercial land - Wilson Bowden Developments, regarding their future development of the commercial parts of the site and also to understand their specific power requirements for the site. This power demand information will in turn help inform the scope of the Growing Places application for support to create a new sub station for the Kew area.

8. Southport Business Park

An initial brief to seek expressions of interest (EOI) from a potential partner developer is under preparation, this will require input from Capita. The brief will be issued later in 2013 with the intention of having a developer partner in place for late 2013.

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10. StepClever Property Project

One final project utilising other funds from the StepClever Property Programme is currently being revised for consideration by the Legacy Funding Steering Group. This project if approved is expected to be able to commence on site by June/July 2013 with a 15 week works programme.

11. Southport Cultural Centre

The building is now open with library, reception and tourist information facilities fully operational. The main and studio theatres are also in use, although there are outstanding elements, including installation of projection equipment, which must be completed before these too become fully operational.

Those elements of the original contract works which are not yet complete, and any outstanding defects, will be completed by 16th May. There will then be a 12 month period during which any defects arising must be dealt with by the main contractor.

Post building works fit out works to the bar and café fit out continue and, subject to equipment availability, are due for completion by the end of June.

The Art Gallery has its first exhibition scheduled for September and the Museum, which is subject to the final stage of the HLF bidding process, is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2014.