

COUNCIL – 5 SEPTEMBER

QUESTIONS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

1. Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Peter Dowd)

“I am sure the Leader of the Council’s well aware of the part that Southport venues played in the development of the Beatles and does he feel it would be feasible to erect a plaque in the Atkinson, where they played when it was the Cambridge Hall in 1962 giving all the dates and venues?”

Response:

“Yes, I am more than happy to make arrangements for such a plaque to be placed in the Atkinson.”

2. Question submitted by Councillor Sir Ron Watson to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Tourism (Councillor Maher)

“Will the Cabinet Member be good enough to outline the current financial position of the Southport Market development together with occupancy rates.”

Response:

“It is good to see Councillor Watson shares our determination for the success of this important Southport regeneration project which, of course, I am aware is within the ward he represents. Occupancy is, as of 3 September 2013, 82% and is expected to increase to 85% in the very near future, with an expected occupancy, as of 1 January 2014, of 89%.

Projected income on the current occupancy level is £303,725.69 and at the expected occupancy level of 89%, as of 1 January 2014, would be £337,964.23. This does not include any potential income derived from electricity charges, equipment rental or from the regular outdoor market.”

3. Question submitted by Councillor Papworth to the Cabinet Member for Transportation (Councillor Fairclough)

“Given that the Council receives £59,750 per annum for the catering concessions on the car park at Burbo Bank Road North, Blundellsands, would it be unreasonable to hope that the many gaping pot-holes will soon be repaired?”

Response:

"Given the severe reduction in available resources across the Council, repairs to pot holes are prioritised. The car park at Burbo Bank is inspected fortnightly and any defects which are found to be dangerous are repaired at the earliest opportunity."

4. Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to Councillor Friel (Council's Spokesperson on the Merseyside Integrated Transport Authority)

- 1 (a) What is (i) the gross cost and (ii) the net cost per annum to Merseytravel of the lease and occupation of the Mann Island HQ?
 - (b) What percentage of the floor area of the building leased is necessary for the performance of Merseytravel functions?
 - (c) What percentage of the surplus floor space is presently:
 - (i) let at market rent?
 - (ii) let at subsidised or discounted rent?
 - (iii) vacant
- 2 (a) How many private directorships are held by the Chair and Chief executive of Merseytravel in respect of companies established connected to Merseytravel operations?
 - (b) What annual payments are received in respect of such directorships?
 - (c) How do the answers to (a) and (b) compare to the situation in 2012 a year prior to the installation of the new Merseytravel Chair?

Response:

- 1(a) i) The gross annual cost based on the 2013/14 budget figures is £5002k
ii) The net annual cost based on the 2013/14 budget figures is £3941k
- 1(b) Currently the organisation occupies 8 floors of the building which equates to approximately 64% of the building.
- 1(c) i) We engage with prospective tenants through an established and experienced commercial property agent to ensure that the floor space is let at current market rent. Market rent fluctuates depending on the prevailing property market conditions when a lease is agreed. No floor space is let at a discounted or subsidised rate as our agents ensure

that we get the best available deal based on current market conditions when any lease is agreed.

Commercial office building leases within the City currently incorporate rent free periods as an integral aspect of the rental agreement, which vary depending on a number of parameters including the details of the specific office space under negotiation, size, proposed lease period, break conditions etc. One and half floors have been leased on such a basis within the building representing approximately 11% of the building.

- ii) As item (i) above
 - iii) Currently there are three and a half vacant floors of which 3 floors have a rental guarantee agreement subsidy paid, whilst not commercially let, to cover up to a maximum of a 5 year period as from April 2011.
- 2(a) The Chair and the Chief Executive do not hold any private directorships in respect of companies established connected to Merseytravel, The Chief Executive is a Director of Beatles Story Limited and Merseyside Passenger Transport Services Limited as part of his role as Director General to the Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive. The Chair does not currently hold any such directorships.
- (b) No payments are currently received in respect of these directorships.
- (c) The new Chair was appointed in June 2012. Consequently a year before that, in June 2011, the previous Chair of the Authority was a Director of Mersey Ferries Limited and for the year 2011/12 he received an annual Director's fee of £661.

In June 2011 the Director General/Chief Executive was a Director of Accrington Technologies Limited, Merseytram 2005 Limited, Merseyside Rapid Transport Limited, Merseytravel Limited, Merseytravel Commercial Services Limited, Merseyside Passenger Transport Services Limited, Liverpool South Parkway Limited, Merseytravel Facilities Management Limited, Global Smart Media Limited, Global Smart Media (IPR) Limited, Livesmart Limited, The Beatles Story Limited, Mersey Ferries Limited, U534 Limited and Spaceport Limited which are all subsidiary or associated companies of Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive. The Chief Executive was paid a total of £9,100 per annum in director's fees.

5. Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Peter Dowd)

“Following recent Cabinet Member decisions relating to projects in Southport Town Centre, are the people of Sefton MBC going to have to become used to the making of financial decisions (a) in secret (b) without the consideration of any proper financial advice or (c) both?”

Response:

“The only secret decisions I'm worried about are the ones stitched up between Tory and Liberal Democrat ministers 200 miles away to decimate Sefton Council's budget without a whimper from Councillor Dawson and his Liberal Democrat colleagues on this Council.”

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

“Can the Cabinet Member explain to the people of Southport who it was that was responsible for Chapel Street/Tulketh Street being laid with large granite slabs in a manner which was apparently not fit for purpose and whether those responsible for the errors are paying in any way for the work having to be redone?”

Response:

“As Councillor Dawson is seemingly aware, this issue does not fall within the Regeneration and Tourism portfolio.

However, having discussed this issue with the appropriate Cabinet Member, I refer Councillor Dawson to an answer previously given to him, via email, to his very similar question of 15 August 2013, by Mr. McConkey, on behalf of Councillor Fairclough (Cabinet Member for Transportation), which I believe has already answered his question.”

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

“Is the Cabinet Member aware of the recent research: ***"The impact of 36 years of grazing management on vegetation dynamics in dune slacks"*** by Jonathan Millett and Sally Edmondson of the Centre for Hydrological and Ecosystem Sciences, Department of Geography, Loughborough University, recently published in the Journal of Applied Ecology, which shows that the effects of grazing of our coastal dunes by a combination of sheep and rabbits is not better or worse than grazing by rabbits only to any statistical significance?”

Response:

“No.”

8. Question submitted by Councillor Dawson to Cabinet Member for Transportation (Councillor Fairclough)

“Is the Cabinet Member satisfied, in the light of recent advice from the Secretary of State for Local Government, that both the present Parking regime and that proposed in the 2013-2015 Budget, involving the raising of a further half a million pounds per year, conforms with legal requirements in terms of the uses to which the revenue surplus is to be put?”

Response:

“Yes. But I would suggest Councillor Dawson takes my advice not to take advice from the same Secretary of State who suggests traffic chaos by permitting unbridled parking on double yellow lines, which is just one of the many odd ideas he thinks up on a daily basis.”

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

“Does the Cabinet Member accept that by making Woodvale residents walk twice as far to get to a Library as any resident of Bootle has to walk to a Library, the Sefton Council is guilty of unfair discrimination?”

Response:

“No”

10. Question submitted by Councillor Preece to the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools, Families and Leisure (Councillor Moncur)

“Given that, in addition to present serious pressures on provision of local primary schools, the Draft Sefton Local Plan identifies no need for or provision for new school sites while proposing the building of thousands of new family homes on green belt all around Southport and other communities within the Borough, will the Cabinet Member reconsider his support for the dubious merits of proposing building houses on the sites of currently-empty schools?”

Response:

“I suggest Councillor Preece takes that matter up with his Tory and Liberal Democrat colleagues, including his Liberal Democratic MP, in the Coalition who are requiring Councils to build on greenbelt and who have also massively cut capital expenditure for school building programmes in Sefton.”