

**\*\*\*\*\* NEWS FLASH \*\*\*\*\***

**Following the full Council Meeting of Thursday 22 November 2012 FRAG OFF would like to release the following Statement. It outlines the background information of events, and we would invite you to attend our:**

**PUBLIC MEETING**

**on**

**Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2012 - 7.00pm @ Formby Sports & Social Club  
(formerly Royal British Legion)**

Residents of Sefton are concerned that Sefton Council do not have a Local Plan in place. This Plan would protect them from inappropriate development, particularly on Green Belt and good quality agricultural farm land.

With a little over a week to collect £2,700 signatures, on 20 November 2012 Formby Residents Action Group called in all 66 councillors, by way of a Petition, containing over 4,000 signatures (which has now risen to over 5,000).

We wanted to hold the council to account over the local Plan and the serious delay in getting one in place (to date it has already taken four years, with another three muted). We wanted to let them know residents were aware that by failing to get the Plan in place they are leaving us all exposed to the developers.

Despite obtaining four times as many signatures as it took to elect some of the Councillors, we were only granted five minutes to speak and put our case across. As a result only a précis of the issues was presented at the council meeting and we were forbidden to ask our questions.

Therefore, we hereby present the complete Statement so that the relevant background can be discussed in full, along with the questions we were told we couldn't ask, and we would suggest that all Councillors take the time to read the full Statement and all questions raised, and answer them in full, in writing.

**COUNCIL MEETINGS**

Our experience of Council Meetings is that when we or other members of the public attend for any reason, they have a meeting beforehand, elsewhere, out of earshot. When the attendees then enter the room they keep their heads bowed and do not interact with the public whatsoever. Not even to say hello or acknowledge their presence and the meeting of 22 November in Southport Town Hall was no different.

When, after our abridged Statement was read out to loud applause in the public gallery, complete silence descended upon proceedings and the 15 minutes of 'debate' we were promised did not ensue. Instead, the Leader of Sefton Council Mr Dowd read a prepared statement asserting that the Councils UDP would protect residents for the foreseeable future until their 5 Year Plan was in place. We believe this information to be misleading, as we believe previous rulings by the Housing Inspectorate in Bristol have included the lack of such a Plan being in place to grant planning permission on green belt and good quality agricultural land.

None of our local councillors, despite listening to our Statement, asked any questions regarding our assertions or opened the debate for us, and therefore, none ensued.

Following their complete silence and what appeared to be their abandonment of us and our cause, we became aware of the Party Whip system. Details of this are explained in the section headed 'Democracy' and may go some way to explain the Councillors behaviour.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Although initially begun as an organisation focused on Formby, the last two weeks have seen the emergence of a borough-wide movement in which the electorate of Sefton are overwhelmingly in support of the protection of the green belt and high quality agricultural land. This campaign is now to be regarded as a borough-wide issue. In this regard, it is evident that the borough-wide concern over development in the green belt is not a sign of NIMBY-ism. NIMBY-ism would not explain why residents of all neighbourhoods in the borough have joined forces with FRAGOFF to address this hugely important issue.

## **THE LOCAL PLAN**

We are not unreasonable and have tried to engage with Councillors and Members to discuss the issues surrounding the local plan and developments, and provide statistics and further information that we have acquired. It has become evident that the elected members do not have all the facts and figures (the correct ones) in order to make informed decisions but are being led by senior Officers at the Council. Sefton residents welcome Council interaction and we would urge them to engage with the community, not alienate them.

It is apparent from freely available information that the Council first commenced work on the Local Plan in 2009 and residents feel the current delay is unacceptable. Some are concerned there may possibly be an ulterior motive or vested interest in the Council delaying the completion of the Five Year Local Plan (which was originally known as the Core Strategy) to allow proposed developments on green belt and farm land to creep through the Planning Inspectorate on appeal, thus giving the residents the illusion that Sefton Council tried to block planning applications, but were overturned.

During the Council meeting of 22 November 2012, the Leader of Sefton Council, Peter Dowd, clearly stated *that the current UDP (which, incidentally, protects the greenbelt) would remain in force until such time as a new Local Plan could be drawn up and agreed – irrespective of the time it takes to accomplish.*

However, in discussions in early 2012 between residents of Sefton and a number of officials within the Council (as well as members of other interested parties), serious doubt was cast on whether the UDP will be allowed to provide the guiding principal for development within the borough. These individuals have expressed concern that if no Local Plan is in place, the provisions of the older UDP WILL NOT BE sufficient to protect the greenbelt from developers. This issue and the status of the UDP going forward, needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency in order that all subsequent decisions can be taken on a fully informed basis.

Sefton Council have made recommendations during various Cabinet Meetings (minutes readily available) that consultant Reports should be carried out regarding the Local Plan, and some 10 months later they have still not been commissioned. The only reasonable conclusion that can be

drawn is that this is a delaying tactic in order to let Developers obtain Planning Permission on Green Belt and farm land through the back door.

## **THE DELAY OF SURVEYS AND STUDIES REQUIRED TO DEVELOP THE LOCAL PLAN**

In April 2012 an Agricultural Survey was identified as necessary and in June 2012, a tender process was initiated to select a company to undertake the necessary studies. In an unusual move, for some reason Sefton Council revealed to the tenderers how much the Council had to spend on such a survey, rather than wait to receive individual Proposals and view the level of fees in their Tenders. As a result, residents feel this possibly prevented taxpayers from receiving 'best value'.

When the residents of Formby informed the Council (at a meeting that took place in August 2012 between Margaret Carney and Alan Young) that one particular site Developers wanted to build on was Grade 2 farm land, Sefton Council informed Formby Residents Action Group: "don't expect the land to come back as grade 2, we are expecting it will be downgraded" This suggests that Officers of the Council were pre-judging the outcome of the study, which raises a number of questions such as why spend taxpayers money on a study, the outcome of which has already been decided?

Frag Off have been advised that downgrading is extremely rare and moreover, the land in question is STILL BEING FARMED, despite assertions it had not been farmed for a number of years. This year alone over 90 tonnes of wheat was farmed, and this was on a bad year. It begs the question what it would reap on a good year

## **LAND VALUES IN THE BOROUGH**

We have been advised that finding farmland in the borough to purchase at an agricultural rate is becoming increasingly difficult as the Developers are offering in excess of 30 times the open market value for land and then banking it in the hope of being allowed to develop it at a future date.

This is certainly not sustainable and suggests that if developers are able to speculate so wildly on land values in these financially constrained times, they must have strong reason to believe that the constraints of the UDP will be short-lived and that development of these areas is likely to go ahead. On what basis would developers take such a gamble without some understanding of development prospects in the borough in the near future? A more learned mind may suspect there is perhaps some complicity and/or duplicitous arrangement between the Council and Developers?

With regard to the Liverpool Road site we have information leading us to believe that particular piece of farm land at the site of the proposed David Wilson Homes development, has recently been sold for 30 times its commercial agricultural value. This is odd, unless there is a presumption of Planning Permission being granted, (before plans have even been submitted). The sale is not yet registered with the land registry (as is the prerogative of the purchaser) and residents wonder if this is because the information is commercially sensitive.

Furthermore, as discussed above, whilst Sefton Council's current UDP does protect Green Belt, there is concern that this protection will only prevail for as long as the UDP remains valid. It is anticipated (as discussed with the Council at our meeting in August 2012) that Seftons' land supply will fall below the level required, which is 3.2 years, in early 2013 (possibly even January).

This then will leave the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol with NO ALTERNATIVE but to pass any Developers application for planning permission as a first step to bringing Seftons housing stock/land supply levels back up.

## **AGRICULTURAL LAND**

Farm land is a national asset and ought to be protected, particularly in light of the future possibility of an in/out EU vote, whereby we may one day require arable land to feed the nation. We should not allow future generations to be totally dependent upon imports. They have a right to grow their own food without this generation concreting over green fields and farm land, as none of us know what the future holds. Food prices will increase if we become wholly reliant on foreign imports, and we want to protect future generations from this, with the people who will suffer the most being the poorest in society as prices become inflated due to us no longer being able to sustain, support or supplement growing our own food.

During the summer months it became abundantly clear that food prices were rising at a much higher rate than family incomes. The main cause of this rise was the increase in price of imported crops. Crops over which the UK has no control, and whose importation adversely affects the balance of payments. It is widely recognised that the UK should have a greater degree of self-sufficiency in food production. Key to increased farming output is the retention of agricultural land for crop production and livestock. In Sefton much of the Greenbelt is agricultural land.

Developers should work with the council in developing the council's priorities. They most certainly shouldn't be encouraged to asset-strip the nation by reducing its ability to produce crops thus allowing it to be held to ransom by the uncontrollable fluctuations in the international food market.

The only people who will suffer are the poorest who will have their food prices inflated because we are no longer able to support or supplement growing our own food. This is certainly not sustainable development.

## **AREAS OF FLOOD RISK**

In addition to issues over farm land categorisation, there appear to be anomalies between current and older versions of maps pertaining to the flood plain. Recent versions have conveniently excluded a number of the areas in Formby that are now being proposed for development. It goes without saying that this could have serious implications for not only any new developments, but existing housing in the vicinity.

Who is responsible when homes are devastated by flooding? The developers appear to take their money and run, leaving it to the taxpayers (in the form of the local Council) to pick up the pieces.

At its lowest point, Formby is 1.5 feet (0.5m) below sea level and already has problems with flooding and surface water drainage on a regular basis, yet by amending their maps Sefton Council appear to say, as do the developers, that there is no flood issue. Perhaps they would like to take the time to speak with residents who cannot obtain Buildings Insurance due to the flood risk, or perhaps visit and observe the wetland wildlife that have made it their permanent habitat as it is so habitually waterlogged.

Sefton refer to a sustainable building programme, but how sustainable is building on green belt, agricultural land, flood plains or by the Alt mouth in view of the viability of the pumping station also being under review? We are told that our climate will change and that we can expect more

flooding, this begs the question why the council would allow development on land that currently has a 1 in 75 chance of flooding and in some areas a 1 in 30 for the future?

This is extremely pertinent as on 26 November 2012 the Association of British Insurers announced a crisis point in their deadlocked talks with the Government over how to fund flood cover for 'at risk' homes. The current system is about to expire and the ABI are not keen to renew it, but neither are the Government willing to stump up the level of subsidy required by the ABI to cover homes on flood plains or other at risk areas. Moreover, the Government were annoyed with the ABI for going public with this information as they have tried to keep a lid on it long enough to reach agreement.

### **ENGAGEMENT BY SEFTON COUNCIL**

Sefton council do not listen or accept any arguments which challenge their figures or statistics, even though the people making these challenges could arguably be seen to be equally if not more professionally qualified than the consultants or Officers preparing the reports. To the residents of Sefton, this process (which only started for many of us with the Local Plan Consultation of summer 2011) appears to be a process of 'going through the motions' in order to justify decisions and outcomes that have previously already been agreed upon by the Council executive. Indeed in a number of the Reports already commissioned (on which the 2011 Core Strategy Consultation was based) it is clear that the Council were directing their consultants to consider certain hypothetical scenarios or outcomes, irrespective of the consultant's view of whether that scenario was valid or not.

Additionally, Sefton Council have informed residents that the Office of National Statistics is incorrect in their 2011 census with regard to the growth of households in Sefton between 2001 and 2011, yet have so far failed to provide proof. How can a council seriously question the ONS – the organisation which provides data to inform key national government policy?

### **FUTURE GROWTH IN SEFTON**

The Office of National Statistics website shows Sefton as one of the lowest growth areas in the country at 0.8%, and as it is households that count rather than population, Sefton's housing requirement therefore stands at about 100/120 per year. The House of Commons library shows a rounded-up figure of 0.9% per year and the House of Commons library is the source of all parliamentary documents.

Using simple maths the figures can be worked out: based on population figures (then and now), the decline in population, sizes of household estimates (say 2.42 or 2.32) indicates a requirement of about 1170 new dwellings (or homes brought back into use) over 10 years.

In addition, as there are currently almost 6000 empty/vacant properties currently in Sefton there seems no need to continue with John Prescott's now defunct and discredited 'Pathfinder' scheme in Bootle Klondyke which is destroying inherent community spirit and historical Victorian terraces against the residents wishes, or the New Homes Bonus aka 'cash for housing' green belt development that the council seems so keen to pursue. So why is the Council doing so?

We are aware there has been a zero new build policy in Bootle for the last 12 – 18 months and that no affordable houses are to be built there, but we suspect the purpose of continuing to

bulldoze be a tactic by the Council to further bring the available housing stock levels below the requisite level in the 5 Year Plan.

## **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

We all agree affordable homes are necessary but houses built on the green belt and costing £299,000 are not affordable. They only serve to increase the profits of the Developers who may also use the granting of one green belt development to pave the way for more.

The nationwide lack of affordable housing is a direct consequence of selling off council houses. Now it seems that this misguided Policy is to be corrected by trashing large areas of green belt and agricultural land in order to build £200k+ affordable homes! Politicians at all levels are directly to blame for the current situation. The long-standing purpose of Council housing stock was to ensure that all levels of society could enjoy some degree of security for their families. This is no longer the case.

Affordable housing is only so if the price is achievable, and usually, only the first owner enjoys this benefit. Should we then continue to build affordable houses until we live in wall to wall cities (which is what green belt was introduced to prevent) or do you restrict how much the property can be sold for at a future date? This problem will persist until the issue of social housing is properly addressed.

By way of example, to be able to purchase an 'affordable' house for £299,000 (which David Wilson Homes is proposing off Liverpool Road) means that a person would have to be earning £70,000.00 per year. It should be noted that Bellway chose not to disclose their introductory prices, despite a member from the Klondyke spotting the same style of housing and asking if they would be at the same price as Bootle, and if not, why not.

Most of the 'affordable' homes offered by developers are part ownership as they directly benefit from this long term. Firstly as house prices tend to increase over time, and secondly when the (part) homeowner does all the maintenance, upkeep and improvements to the property out of their own pocket.

As a result, it should not be considered a sustainable viable housing option. Developers will claim to be disadvantaged because their financial investment remains tied up, and that property prices can do down, but this is rare, and in reality, the Developers percentage share increases in value at a higher rate than depositing the money. In addition to benefiting from property price rises, they also enjoy an incremental increase in value as a result of the homeowner's efforts.

There is obviously something in it for them or they would not offer these arrangements, and in residents opinion they are a cynical example of the wealthiest in society directly benefiting from the striving.

All parties should be discussing with and involving the local community in assessing what is required. Let us get involved with decisions about where the developments should be, what type of housing should be provided, and the design.

When Frag Off have questioned the Council about empty homes, especially new builds which are costing over £300,000.00 and remain unsold after several years, the response is "the developer got it wrong" but we would argue the Council got it wrong, as they passed the plans.

Do they not know what type of houses people want? It is certainly not the “plastic Barbie doll houses” they try to build which do not even conform to the EU. We have the smallest new build houses in the EU and in some cases developers describe rooms as a bedroom when you cannot even get a single bed into the room. Maybe they think people are getting shorter and therefore need smaller beds.

### **THE POWERHOUSE SITE**

As mentioned above, at the unadvertised ‘Public Consultation’ event at Formby pool on 20 November, Bellway Homes refused to disclose details of their starting prices on the proposed Powerhouse site.

So confident are Bellway of securing Planning Permission for this development, that they have apparently coerced two Formby home owners into selling their property at what is rumoured to be twice the market value, (a deal purported to be in the region of £1,000,000) in order to secure access to the site. They are very lucky, if the Council had dealt with it no doubt they would have compulsorily purchased their homes at a reserved market value, as they did in the Klondyke.

Apparently, the reason given by Bellway homes for not announcing the starting prices of their proposed Powerhouse homes is because it gives them a degree of ‘fluidity’ with regards to what they ultimately build. This would be subject to popularity and affordability, and allows the build to change as they go along. This all sounds lovely and community friendly, but could another reason be because they had no time to finalise the details as the Proposal had to be rolled out very quickly to ensure it goes through before other factors come into play? All will become clear under section ‘Archaeological Findings’.

### **INFRASTRUCTURE**

Many places suggested for development are unable to cope as the infrastructure cannot accommodate. If there are not enough school places, doctors, dentists, or major access routes, Heavy pressure comes to bear on existing facilities and major problems ensue. In addition developers often avail of existing drainage and sewage systems which can cause problems for the new and existing households. Flooding is a very real issue to Sefton residents, with some unable to get flood damage on their home or buildings insurance, yet the Planning Department does not appear to take any of these concerns into account.

### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS**

A very important revelation came to light last week when BBC1 aired a programme featuring the University of Liverpool archaeology team.

Three months ago, in August 2012, they discovered Mesolithic remains dating back to approximately 5000bc in Lunt Meadow. The Professor described it as ‘the find of his career’ and one which could potentially propel Sefton into the ‘premier league’ of archaeological areas.

These finds coincide with David Wilson Homes rushed 2 day notice public consultation, and with Bellway Homes following hot on their heels, and now we hear Barratt Homes are in negotiation for land in two separate areas either side of the by-pass.

Someone less cynical may suspect this stampede for land and Planning Permission is to ensure it’s secured before the area is declared of ‘National importance’ and a Preservation Order put in place. Considering the Mesolithic era predates the Neolithic by thousands of years, and only one other site has ever been discovered, the residents of Sefton hereby request that Sefton Council

and any and all Developers behave responsibly and DO NOT commence preparations or any building works over any area before ALL enquiries in this vein have been conclusively exhausted, and a Statutory Archaeological Survey undertaken.

### **THE 'ATTITUDE' OF SEFTON COUNCIL**

As discussed above, it is the view of many Sefton residents that their Council do not listen or accept any argument which challenges their figures or version of events.

The Council aren't interested in enquiring so are unaware that many of the professionals consulted by Frag Off are equally if not more professionally qualified as the Consultants chosen by the Council to prepare Reports and we can only assume the Council's refusal to consider information presented by us is because it is unfavourable to their case, and they do not want such information filtering down to the ears of the residents. The adoption of this stance by the Council is evidently in order for them to get their own desires bulldozed through Chambers with total disregard for public opinion.

Can any Councilors explain why, when it comes to proposals to develop in the greenbelt, the residents of Sefton overwhelmingly feel that they are in conflict not only with developers but also Sefton Council who are supposed to represent us? The feeling across the Borough is that the proposals to develop in the greenbelt (the 2011 Core Strategy Options 2 and 3) are the result of proposals that have evolved following collaboration between the Council and developers. Rather than working with the electorate to protect the greenbelt, much of which is valuable and productive agricultural land.

The elected representatives and appointed Officers of the Council appear to be on a relentless drive to turn the greenbelt over to developers whose only motivation is profit. At no point since the Core Strategy was launched some 18 months ago, has there been any evidence that elected Council members are wholeheartedly willing to represent the views of the people of Sefton – those people whose votes made their position on the council possible.

Can any of the councillors explain why when it comes to scrutiny of planning applications, the view of the people of Sefton is that Sefton Council is not fulfilling its role, with deficiencies in Applications being identified by resident groups? By way of example, we cite the recent Application to develop on Damfield Lane in Maghull (Planning Ref S/2012/0550).

Residents opposed to the development and identified significant technical omissions from the Planning Application in terms of handling sewage and other effluent from the development. In letter ref SS018065/RAJ/CB (dated 24 Aug 2012) the developer's consultants refer to "problems in the public network" and have confirmed that at times of peak flow, sewage will be diverted in to a specially built tank from where it will be transferred by road to a sewage treatment facility. Not only is this an unusual and remarkable set of measures – measures which are neither sustainable nor cost-effective – they serve to illustrate the concerns of many residents that the infrastructure within many parts of Sefton is at or close to capacity - concerns that the Council's Planning Department seem oblivious to.

It should not have taken the intervention of residents in July/August 2012 to identify this problem, and we ask why did the Councils own scrutiny not identify this issue in the original Application which was made in May 2012?

In terms of sewage and other infrastructure the Council seem incapable of identifying what is considered to be a serious flaw in the proposals to significantly expand the number of dwellings in the borough (i.e. Core Strategy Options 2 and 3) The Damfield Lane development referred to above is a relatively modest development and yet at times of peak flow, exceeds the capacity of



the local sewage infrastructure. On a wider scale, what consideration have the council given to the impact of Core Strategy Options 2 and 3 on existing infrastructure across the borough? And what costed measures (studies, improvement works etc) are being considered to address this issue? How are these to be funded?

At no stage has the Council highlighted any benefits to be gained by existing residents of the borough arising from the implementation of Core Strategy Options 2 and 3, and in terms of budgets, we understand from the Council website that there are major budget deficits looming. Also on their website the Council state that only 37% of the budget income is from Council Tax. Even when funding from central Government is taken into consideration (ie. the New Homes Bonus, which mirrors Council Tax income for new homes) it is apparent that each new home built will widen the gulf between council income and the cost of running, maintaining and servicing the borough – unless the council considers that additional new development can be funded within the existing highly constrained, budgets? In what way can the council's proposals to build substantial numbers of new homes at the edge of the existing built up area (thus extending the area within the borough that needs to be provided with council services) help to tackle the stated budget problems? Perhaps the developers are going to assist!

We are aware that Sefton Council has applied for grants under the New Homes Bonus Scheme. The government indicate this money should be spent on the local community and that Councils should consult with the public. This is certainly not the case with Sefton Council. They want to cut services to the local community by closing libraries etc. and this is what the new homes bonus should be used for. It should not be utilised in meeting contractual obligations in respect of Housing Market Renewal, in other words; being paid to demolish houses.

## **DEMOCRACY**

In May this year local elections took place to select Councillors to represent the public. The public may not have bothered voting if they knew that it was a waste of their effort. The public's views and opinions, instead of being lobbied for by their elected representatives the Councillors, are effectively circumvented as the ruling Labour Party Council Officers (who are mostly long serving employees of the Council), neuter the Councillors on important issues and use the Party Whip system (by telling them which way they must vote).

We are of the belief that we live in a democratic society not a dictatorship. Can the Council therefore, explain why democratically elected members of the taxpaying public are being told how to vote? The Officers of Sefton Council are paid employees, no matter how long serving they are, and not elected to run our Council. There appears to be a severe case of the 'tail wagging the dog'. The elected representatives are paid by the taxpayer (us) and not the Council, and as such are accountable to us, the public.

Having attended numerous Council Meetings, it also appears accepted practice that if any members of the public wish to attend, the various Council Officers and Councillors turn up early for a real 'meeting' which takes place elsewhere before the advertised one, and instructions how to vote/keep quiet/ignore and don't make eye contact with the public in attendance, are meted out before what appears to be a 'sham' official Meeting.

Indeed, such circumstances took place on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> November, with all members of the council asked to attend a 'pre briefing' an hour and a half before the official Council Meeting in the Town Hall commencing at 6.30. In fact, it could be argued that if the Council Officers and Elected Members feel it necessary to have to say things furtively behind closed doors, then whatever they are discussing is something they don't want us to know. As it's our money they're spending, there

is no information that should be unavailable for public discussion and dissemination and the Councils manner is rude and condescending. Presumably this is to make the public feel as uncomfortable and unwanted as possible in order to deter them from future attendance (or perhaps 'interference' as the Council may see it).

Besides various Grants, it is taxpayer's money they're spending and Sefton residents will no longer put up with being paid lip service. At no point since the Core Strategy was launched in 2009, has there been any evidence that elected Councillors are willing to represent the views of the people of Sefton when pitted against the main unelected protagonists at the Council.

We would urge Sefton Council to get its house in order and listen to what the public want. This starts by listening to what they are saying. Local Action Groups are all concerned about these issues and the dismissive behaviour of Sefton Council has encouraged us to join forces. This is our Borough, we pay the taxes and we want our Councillors to stand up and be counted and air our views, and not to feel pressured by the Council Officers in any way or indeed their own Leaders.

Should the Council ignore its residents and forge ahead like a bull in a china shop, then we intend to have a vote of no confidence in respect of Sefton Council.

### **PRIME MINISTERS ANNOUNCEMENT TO 'CURB' GREENBELT PROTESTORS RIGHTS**

Last but not least, we note David Cameron's recent newspaper comments regarding thwarting the public's right to object to planning development applications.

We would remind the Right Honourable gentleman that the right of residents to be instrumental in developing their local plans was enshrined in his Conservative Party's flagship "National Planning Policy Framework", from which the following quote is taken from Section 17:

"These 12 principles are that planning should:

- be genuinely plan-led, empowering local people to shape their surroundings, with succinct local and neighbourhood plans setting out a positive vision for the future of the area..."

Having had this document foisted upon us despite a great deal of controversy when it was in its draft stage, if any such action were to be implemented by the Prime Minister Action Groups around the country will join forces to take it to the European Court of Human Rights in order to uphold and maintain democracy.

Our investigations are on-going, but in the meantime, we have refined the issues discussed above into a number of specific questions.

Under the Freedom of Information Act we hereby formally request that the Council respond to each of them in the order and form in which they are presented, and for transparency and in the interests of democracy, we also kindly request that the Council response to these questions is published in an open letter suitable to be offered to all elements of the local press and media.

## **QUESTIONS FOR THE COUNCIL**

### **Question 1)**

Agricultural land is currently valued at between seven to eight thousand pounds per acre. This being the case why has a Developer purportedly paid £8.5 million for land off Liverpool Road valued at £295,000 unless they have a presumption of planning permission?

### **Question 2)**

Why are Sefton Council continuing their demolition of the Klondyke which began under John Prescott's discredited 'Pathfinder' Scheme? Is the driving force behind this the Overarching Development Agreement the Council have with Bellway Homes?

### **Question 3)**

Is the driving force behind Sefton Council's behaviour, a ruse for getting the 'New Homes Bonus Scheme' (more widely known as 'cash for housing') into their general coffers to meet day to day bills or their contractual agreement with Bellway Homes?

### **Question 4)**

Why are the Council incorporating £9.5 million of the New Homes Bonus into their budget and then using it to meet their contractual agreement with Bellway Homes under the Pathfinder Scheme instead of bringing empty homes back into use? It is clear that the driving force behind Council plans to build new homes is to generate more money for the council. Would it not be more prudent to look at where you are currently spending money unnecessarily and make the cuts there? Would it not be more prudent to look at where money is currently spent? Perhaps you should look at the £28,000+ allocated to the Chief Executive for 2011/12 against "Orange Personal Communications" or "Specialist Corporate Chauffeur" amounting to over £25,000+ or indeed explain what these are and why they are required.

### **Question 5)**

Why are Sefton Council allowing their land supply to fall below 3.2 years? the requisite level which they know will allow Developers to challenge and appeal their denied green belt Planning Applications with the Building Inspectorate in Bristol, irrespective of the Councils UDP Plan. Why have the Council not been more diligent and assertive in gathering the information they require in order to get a Local Plan in place? Is this a deliberate tactic by Sefton Council in order to allow development on green belt for Sefton Councils preferred Developers?

### **Question 6)**

Is there any agreement either verbal or written, between Sefton Council and ANY Developer for the Council to benefit financially in any way from the increased profits from building in the Green Belt rather than developing Brownfield sites or house-clearance areas in Bootle?

**Question 7)**

We are not against affordable homes and agree there is a need but affordable should mean just that. Can you explain how you intend to make £299,000 'affordable'?

**Question 8)**

We believe in responsible development and what blends in with the communities. Can any councillors explain why, when it comes to proposals to develop in the greenbelt, the residents of Sefton overwhelmingly feel that they are in conflict not only with developers but also with the Council? The feeling across the Borough is that the proposals to develop in the greenbelt are the result of negotiations evolved following collaboration between the Council and Developers. Rather than working with the electorate to protect the greenbelt (much of which is valuable and productive agricultural land) the elected representatives and appointed Officers of the Council appear to be on a relentless drive to turn the greenbelt over to Developers whose only motivation is profit. Please explain the urgency behind the sudden flurry of activity by Developers to secure areas of greenbelt?

**Question 9)**

Can Sefton residents have an assurance from the Council that in light of the recent Mesolithic findings, no development will take place before a Statutory Archaeological Survey has taken place?

**Question 10)**

Can the council confirm who is responsible for the costs of cleaning up the sites brought forward by the developers?

**Question 11)**

Can the council confirm who is responsible for the clean-up of any flooding in the borough, in particular on new build sites that occur after the developer has been signed off and the new structures 'adopted'?

**Question 12)**

Can the council confirm who pays the costs of the clean up after flooding issues to remedy the immediate problems?

**Question 13)**

On what criteria were Bellway Homes chosen as the 'preferred' Developer?

**Question 14)**

Can the Leader of Sefton Council have the foresight to realise the need of the nation for productive farming land and the courage to support the retention of crop producing land in the area?

**Question 15)**

Can Sefton Council ensure that priority is given to the development of Brownfield and derelict land first, in preference to agricultural land, therefore placing the nation's welfare before the self-centered developer who simply want to take the most profitable option?