

Green Spaces Review meeting for Greenbank,
Mossley Hill and Church wards

Held on Friday 20 March 2015 (18:30 – 20:00),

at the Merseyside Police Recreational Ground, Riversdale Road, Grassendale

Over 90 people present. (*Comments in italics are my own comments/interpretations*).

Simon O'Brien (SOB) chairing the meeting, introduced the Review members present, who included David Hughes (the recently appointed Head of the Planning Department, in Liverpool).

SOB outlined how the Review came about. As well as the meetings being held this month, a series of workshops are planned. After the meetings, workshops and site visits, SOB will report back to the Mayor in June. Later in the year, there will be four meetings- north, south, east and west. Opened up to floor for comments, questions and discussion.

Councillor Richard Kemp (RK) (Liberal Democrat Councillor for Church Ward) gave apologies for Councillor Erica Kemp, who due to her role as Lord Mayor is unable to attend. He mentioned that he was specifically here to talk about the Calderstones area (which falls within the ward he represents).

He also mentioned that if Liverpool is to do well, we need to maintain a green and pleasant land. Does not agree with the assertion that Liverpool has too much Green Space. Believes that what we need is high quality Green Space.

RK also questioned the Local Plan, and the sites listed as potential development sites. Does not agree that the sites are surplus to requirements. Reported that Beechley stables have recently only been given a three year lease by the Council, and have been offered another site (which the sale of Beechley will pay for). If the sites on the Local Plan list (*put forward by the Physical Assets department of the City Council*) are developed, the character of the remaining park will be drastically changed.

RK also made reference to sites where planning permission exists, but where development is yet to start. These included the Festival Gardens, Liverpool Waters and so on.

In connection with Calderstones Park, made reference to the positive role that the Reader Organistaion has brought to the park.

RK stressed that if Liverpool's population does grow, then there will be an increased need for Green Spaces.

SOB commented with regards to how can we encourage more usage of the parks and encourage the right sort of enterprises. SOB thinks that the parks are underused. (*It should be borne in mind he has been visiting the sites at a time of the year when it is cold and damp, horticultural attractions are a lot less and, the evenings are still dark. Additionally, many of the sites will have been visited mid-week, when many people are at work*).

SOB also said that we need to rethink how Green Spaces are used. He commented upon the inequity of Green Spaces across the city.

David Hughes (DH) commented upon finance and national austerity implications, along with the cuts that Liverpool is facing. There will be a 25% reduction in statutory duties, with 50% reductions elsewhere (such as parks and leisure). DH stated that by the end of 2016/2017, there will be no money for non-statutory services.

DH also referred to the Local Plan being prepared. All sites which could potentially contribute to housing and employment are being looked at and assessed. The Draft Plan will designate sites as such. **This Review will lead on the process of what should be built where.**

DH commented that a number of developments are not happening because they are not viable. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) says that Councils have to have a 5 year housing supply (*although the targets are set by the individual local authorities, such as Liverpool*). This 5 year supply will be tested at public inquiry to see if it is sound. Figures will be scrutinised by a Government appointed Inspector, and also by developers. If not viable (commercially viable for a developer) the sites cannot be included in the 5 year housing supply.

Alison Ball (AB), a Mossley Hill resident commented upon the fact that Parks and Green Spaces offer a range of services, including health and well-being, biodiversity, flood prevention and pollution alleviation. Stressed that this was important for poorer areas, as well as for some of the more affluent areas in the south. Asked whether in this process, all of these issues are being mapped out and used to make informed decisions.

SOB reported that he had extensively read the evidence base. Made specific reference to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), produced in 2010. An update of the SHMA is due out in May. He does not believe that the board should address anything in relation to housing figures until the SHMA comes out.

SOB also commented that the National Health Service should look at the value of parks, and start chipping in.

AB pointed out, that other agencies in the City Region (such as United Utilities) should be engaged with.

SOB made reference to Knowlsey Council, and their detailed costings for Parks and Green Spaces, especially down to individual level.

Steve Perkins (SP), who had worked for Liverpool City Council in the Parks and Open Spaces department for over 40 years, asked whether this board had any influence on sites that have been declared 'surplus to requirements', as part of the Local Plan.

SOB replied 'We are an advisory board'.

SP asked whether there was any method of influencing those planning applications that have recently been submitted for sites declared 'surplus to requirements'.

SOB replied 'We will look at everything'.

SP asked about the figures within the Strategic Housing Plan, which referred to imbalances within the market (such as under allowance of 5 bedroomed dwellings). SP asked as to whether recent developments had addressed these.

Victoria James (VJ) a Woolton-based estate agent (and also on the Review Board) replied that there was a definite shortage of executive homes. Made reference to the high sales at the former New Heys school site (*a Redrow development along Mather Avenue, which includes building upon the former school's large playing fields*).

John Shaw (JS) asked how many units given planning permission in Liverpool, have not yet been built.

DH (*did not actually answer the question*) replied that developers will only build if it is viable and profitable. Also stated that people want newer stock, not older stock. DH commented that as a Council, we are looking to develop brownfield sites.

JS suggested that stalled schemes should be given some impetus to proceed. Made reference to the stalled apartments scheme on the waterfront, at Columbus Quay (just north of the former Garden Festival site). The steelwork for this development was partially erected eight years ago, but there has been no activity at the site since.

SOB reported that there is a 3.5% vacancy rate in higher band Council Tax properties. He reported that this is a good market figure. Also commented, that the market can be suppressed, if too much housing is built in an area. The Review Board will be looking at this.

Jean Hill (JH) commented that developers prefer to build on Greenfield sites. The Council should not dangle prime Greenfield sites in front of developers. Also asked whether Redrow is the only developer, and why are they setting the agenda.

John Davies (JD) made reference to the Sefton Park Meadowlands. He pointed out the propaganda in association with sites, for example how revenue raised might be spent. Also made reference to the compensatory Green Spaces that the Mayor talks about, and claims to have created. These temporary sites are no proper compensation for historical, well established green spaces.

JD also pointed out, that if the Mayor offers Green Spaces to developers, then these will be developed first.

DH replied there had previously been a presumption that brownfield sites should be developed first. The NPPF does not provide a presumption of brownfield first. (*Neither does the NPPF recommend building upon highly valued areas of Green Space*).

(In 2014 following concerns about the amount of Greenfield development being considered

across the country), the Department of Communities and Local Government issued a circular saying that local authorities should not be selective in their usage and interpretation of the NPPF).

DH also reported that Councils have to assess the viability of individual schemes. Again reported that NPPF forces the Council to produce a deliverable 5 year housing supply (*again, housing targets are locally set*).

JH commented that ‘Nobody requires the Council to sell public land’.

DH responded that there are two issues here ‘land ownership and planning’. The Council will look objectively at planning issues. The Council has the decision as to whether to sell land or not.

Colin Lafferty (CL) introduced himself as an Aigburth resident who works in the area of social housing. Made specific reference to Sefton Park Meadowlands. Questions the Council’s assumptions about the value of selling the land. Council originally quoted a ten million pounds price tag. However, the number of units originally planned have been scaled down. This is reported to have greatly reduced the amount of money the Council will receive from any sale of this land.

CL estimates that the Council will receive between one and two million pounds from the sale of the Sefton Park Meadowlands. He emphasised that this would be a drop in the ocean, with regards to the deficit. However, Redrow will stand to make between 20 and 30 million pounds profit from the site.

SOB asked if he could be provided with CL’s calculations and figures. SOB also re-affirmed that all Green Spaces would be looked at, as part of the Review.

Alan Scott (AS) reported that he has lived in Aigburth for 25 years, but is originally from North Liverpool. He spoke of the value of the Meadowlands, and how special spots such as this have to be cherished. He highlighted the beauty of the Meadowlands. To destroy the Sefton Park Meadowlands will be an act of civic vandalism. AS believes that the Meadowlands have special character, and is top of the list for quality, across the city.

Sandra Warren (SW) also mentioned that she is originally from North Liverpool, but has lived in the Aigburth area for 25 years. Asked what the workshops will entail. SW also pointed out that Liverpool does not have readily visible or accessible countryside (as other cities do). Our Parks and Green Spaces should be kept. There is no way the Meadowlands can be described as ‘incidental green space’.

Pat Connor (PC) lives in Park Avenue and believes it outrageous to be contemplating developing the Meadowlands site. Pointed out that there are retired people who choose to live in this areas because of the peace and quiet it affords. Development here would detract from the quality of the area. PC said that some people just want a bit of peace and quiet in their lives. He suggested planting wildflowers at the site, and making it into a nature reserve.

At this point SOB intervened, and commented that he had to say “that at meetings held in other wards, people had suggested that the site should be built upon, and the money spent in their areas”.

JD pointed out that he had been to all of the Review meetings and had not heard anybody say this. Numerous other people commented that they had not heard this said, at any of the Review meetings that they had attended.

SOB then said, that at the end of the Wavertree meeting he had been approached by some people (who claimed to have been reluctant to speak out during the meeting) and they had said this. (*Note the earlier plural ‘meetings’, now becoming a singular ‘meeting’*).

A member of the public present then asked the people present who wanted to see the site built upon. Out of a room of over 90 members of the public, only one hand went up (*see later comments*).

Councillor Lawrence Brown (LB) (Green Councillor for Greenbank Ward) commented upon the good turn out for this evening’s meeting, especially with the difficulty of accessing the site (*two buses and a long walk, for anybody coming to the site by public transport from Greenbank or Church wards*). Also pointed out that there were none of the Labour Councillors from the area present (*6 of the 9 Councillors for the wards represented are Labour*).

LB highlighted that two years ago, the present administration had taken the decision to sell the Meadowlands. A year ago, they told him that it would not be a big issue on the doorsteps. However, the issue had developed into a major campaign.

Lynne Seibold (LS) expressed her disappointment in the present administration, especially as she had originally been a Labour supporter. She highlighted the value of the Meadowlands to her.

John Middleton (JM) reported that he had been a resident of the area for 40 years and the Sefton Park area was one of the reasons why he came here. Reported upon his historical research of maps and the minutes of Council meetings from the 1870s. JM explained that the Parks were built to attract people in. The Council at the time (*1860s*) had a vision, a city with Parks all the way around (north and south). Mentioned that the competition plan of 1867 was not the definitive plan, and that schematic, actual plans were created in the years that followed.

JM made reference to the 1875 map that shows plots of land allocated for building around the park, but shows no housing plots allocated for the Meadowlands. Highlighted the vision, to link the Parks via a ‘Grand Boulevard’ running from Sefton Park up to Walton Hall Park. Finished by saying ‘Don’t sell off the Parks, sell the City’.

A member of the public asked why are we not coming up with dynamic ways so that if Greenfield sites are developed, brownfield sites should be developed in tandem.

SOB replied that he believes that there is scope for packages, but it could be a dangerous precedent to set. Also commented that houses had to be built, and we either build up, or if not

addressed, then we end up having to build out, on agricultural land. (*My inferring here, is that SOB is suggesting that some Greenfield sites will have to be built upon*).

JH commented upon a perception that people in North Liverpool believe that South Liverpool receive better treatment in terms of maintenance and expenditure, but that there is common cause across the City for protecting Green Spaces.

Several other people commented upon the fact that they had not heard one person asking for the Meadowlands to be built upon.

SOB commented 'There are differences of opinion.'

It was again asked who wanted to see the site built upon. Again only one hand went up, from a room of over 90 people.

The lady who had held her hand up when this question was put to the room (*and who obviously had her own agenda, and appeared to be gunning for just about everybody*), then spoke. She lives in North Liverpool, and said that this is the 3rd meeting that she had been to. She was concerned that the panel was almost entirely made up of people from South Liverpool. She said that she believed that due to the attacks upon him over the issue, Joe Anderson had done a Pontious Pilate regarding Sefton Park Meadows, and that this Review was his way of washing his hands of it. She claimed that it was all about house prices and post code snobbery. After criticising people who are from the north of Liverpool, but choose not to live there, she wanted to know how much social housing had been built in South Liverpool and how much in North Liverpool. Going off on a tangent she then had a snipe at the Green Party, claiming that in Liverpool they were against any house building.

David Morgan (DM) (Green candidate for Greenbank Ward) commented upon the Council plans to sell the Meadowlands. He pointed out that the land does not belong to the Council, it belongs to the people. He also mentioned that the sale of the land will have no impact upon the scale of the cuts. Provision of Green Space should not be a zero line approach. For somebody to gain Green Space, it should not be at the expense of existing Green Space. DM also questioned where the auditing is.

As time was starting to run out, things ended rather quickly. SOB was keen to bring the meeting to an end. All of the people speaking in defence of Green Spaces, and especially the Sefton Park Meadowlands had received strong rounds of applause.

David Hughes (Head of Planning at Liverpool) concluded that he had enjoyed this evening's discussions, but that he could not comment upon the planning application for the land at Park Avenue. Several people shouted out 'The Meadows' at this. (*There is a clear pattern of the present administration refusing to refer to, or acknowledge, the site as the Meadowlands.*)

Paul Slater

