SAVE SEFTON PARK MEADOWS

Briefing Note 1.

15th April 2013

This is the first briefing note for supporters about Sefton Park Meadows. It has been compiled and written by Martin Dobson. If you would like more copies or an online version (so you can use the hyperlinks to see the original documents) please email SaveSeftonParkMeadows@gmail.com

History

The land was purchased in 1867. Under the original Sefton Park Scheme, the site was to develop the meadows with large villas. This was never done.

It was later used as a tree nursery. For a while there was a plan to build a primary school on the site but this was abandoned.

In 1974 the Council decided to build council houses on the site in response to the demands of the housing clearance programme, but in 1976 the council resolved not to proceed with the housing project and to retain the site as an open space.

There was a plan to sell the land for development in 1989 - but this was abandoned. The City Engineer at the time said "This section of Park Avenue is part of the University Cycle Route. The alternative to road closure would be close the route to vehicular traffic under a Traffic Regulation Order, retaining it for use as a footway and cycle route”.

There was proposal to build 66 flats in four villas of 5 storeys each in 1991 and planning permission was sought by developer: Summit Development.
This caused an outcry and a petition of over 5000 signatures, and questions in the House of Commons from Local MP David Alton. The land was referred to as the Meadows and Meadowlands in the media.

In 1992 The City Planning Officer wrote “When reporting in 1990 on the proposal to release the site for development I commented that “in ideal circumstances the site ought to left in its present use as public open space”¹

He went on to say “The preferred future use of this site is still that it should remain as open space, as part of Sefton Park, a view echoed by English Heritage when originally consulted on the application”²

He concluded “There are considerable risks that a less than satisfactory scheme might obtain planning permission (e.g. on appeal), and this would represent a lost opportunity for the city and be detrimental to the character of the two conservation areas involved”³.

The Meadows have been used on occasion as car parking space for events in Sefton Park relieving congestion on the perimeter road and lack of designated car park provision around the park.

The Council’s proposal to sell the land for development

On 15th March the Cabinet included a proposal to sell Sefton Park Meadows on the agenda of the Cabinet meeting on Friday 22nd March 2013. There had been no attempt to consult with friends of Sefton Park, The Sefton Park Forum, The Avenues Neighbourhood Network, Lark Lane Community Association, Mossley Hill Residents Association nor Sudley Area Residents

¹ Extract from Report CES/252/92 ‘Land at Queens Drive/mossley Hill Drive’ land management Sub-Committee  7 Aug 1992

² Extract from Report CES/252/92 ‘Land at Queens Drive/mossley Hill Drive’ land management Sub-Committee  7 Aug 1992

³ Extract from Report CES/252/92 ‘Land at Queens Drive/mossley Hill Drive’ land management Sub-Committee  7 Aug 1992
Association. Indeed the Sefton Park Forum is a council run consultation committee and had no prior knowledge of either this proposed sale nor any other plan for new developments in the park.

A small group of people protested outside the Cabinet Meeting on 22nd March and several people addressed the meeting but the cabinet voted to sell.

The Item was ‘called in’ to the Regeneration Select Committee. This time a large protest outside was filmed by the BBC and other local media. Several people came in to witness and asked questions to the meeting. Approximately 120 questions were submitted to this committee prior to the meeting and to date none of these have been answered.

Unusually the meeting of the Regeneration Select Committee was dominated by Mayor Anderson who, although not a member of the committee, addressed every question. None of the actual members of Regeneration Select Committee spoke to ask questions, respond to points, or make comments. It is surprising that the committee felt that they could reach a decision having had no discussion and having not addressed any of the written questions.

Council Policies

It is clear that the proposal to sell this green space within a conservation area is contrary to many of the council’s own policies.

The Mayor has said that objections which relate to planning issues are not relevant at this time as the proposal is merely to sell the land. But the cabinet made it clear on 22nd March that any sale would be “subject to planning permission”. The council should not be considering a sale subject to a planning application which would breach its own policies.
The Meadows are clearly shown in the Liverpool Unitary Development Plan as Green Space and part of the Sefton Park Conservation Area. This plan remains current until 2016.

The Liverpool Unitary Development Plan states new building in conservation areas should not be allowed unless “the proposal does not lead to the loss of open space or landscape features (trees and hedges) important to the character or appearance of the area.”\(^4\) The current proposal would lead to the loss of Open Space.

The UDP goes on to state “The City Council will resist new development which would detract from the character, appearance and setting of designated conservation areas. It will seek the retention of existing features and important landscape elements including trees and hedgerows and open areas.”\(^5\) Selling the land for luxury housing would detract from the character, appearance and setting of the conservation area.

Liverpool Core Strategy Submission Draft 2013 details the council’s forward plans for developing housing projects on several sites including open spaces in the south of the city but makes no mention of developing open spaces in the inner suburbs, and no specific mention of Sefton Park Meadows. Indeed in the Section on Page 23 called ‘the Vision for the Core strategy’ it states “important environmental and open space assets including the current Green Wedges will have been protected and improved.”\(^6\)

The Liverpool Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Update 2012 is a comprehensive list of land available for housing in all the wards of Liverpool. It makes no mention of Sefton Park Meadows. The officers who compiled the list did not think the inclusion of the Meadowlands was appropriate.

**National Government Policies**

The Council’s proposal to sell the Green Land at Sefton Park Meadows appears to be against National Government Policies:

\(^4\) [Liverpool UDP HD11iv P40](#)

\(^5\) [Liverpool UDP 7:101 P40](#)

\(^6\) [Liverpool Core Strategy Submission Draft 4. The vision for the Core strategy Page 23](#)
Paragraph 74 “Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land including playing fields, should not be built on unless an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements.” There has been no such assessment in this case.

Paragraph 76 “Local communities through local and neighbourhood plans should be able to identify special protection green areas of particular importance to them. By designating land as Local Green Space local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances” The Local Communities have not been consulted about the council’s rushed plans to sell. Local communities should be given the opportunity to identify land like the Meadows as Green Areas, as it clearly has a special importance to them.

Paragraph 78 “Local Policy for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with policy for Green Belts”

Sefton Park Meadows has been designated a Green Space under the UDP and this last paragraph is stating that the protection of Green Space is the same as for Green belt. There is also a whole chapter (Chapter 9) giving more detail of the protection afforded to Green Belt land.

Why does the council want to sell this land?

There has been no coherent reason given for wanting to sell this land. People understand that the council is in severe financial restraints and is having to cut services. But at no time has the council explained that the sale of the land would be used to save services.

The Mayor has made several statements about why he needs to sell the land. None of which have been followed up with a costed plan. None of which have formed the part of any consultation with neighbourhood groups.

He says that the money is needed to make improvements to Sefton Park. But no improvements have been identified by the recognised consultation groups: Sefton Park Forum and Friends of Sefton Park. Indeed the park has only recently benefitted from a £6m re-fit.
He says that he needs the money to repair the roads around the park. But there is currently a programme of works underway to replace the roads around the park. Hopefully this will not need to be replaced for many years to come.

He says he wants to build a permanent stage in the park, but this has not been flagged in any forward plan or consultation document.

**The Campaign/Popular Support**

The campaign to stop the sale of this land has very quickly attracted huge support from local people. Over 2000 people have registered on our [website](#), nearly 1500 have signed the [on-line petition](#) and many more have signed a paper petition. The media have supported the campaign with articles in local press, coverage on Radio Stations and North West TV. The proposal to sell provoked outrage on social media networks.

The campaign held a Mass Picnic on 1st April attracting a reported 400+ people. There was a public meeting on Tuesday 16th attended by .... people.
The people’s love of the land

The campaign has brought together many different groups of people who have used and loved this piece of land regularly for many years.

Campaigners have been collecting testimonies from people who have a long association with the meadows for an application for Town Green Status. We currently have testimonies from over 50 people.

Lynn from Greens Walk says “I have been using the meadows for over 25 years. When the children were small we were on it every day. We couldn’t let the children cross the busy road into the main park. We have no gardens - so the meadows are our only open space.”

Lynn B from Greens Walk feels safe on the meadows after dark. “I wouldn’t go into Sefton Park after dark, it’s not safe, but you are OK on the meadows”.

Anna from St. Michael’s has been walking her dogs twice a day on the land for about 18 years “I go to the meadows because it is quiet. The Main park is often so full of people I go to the meadows because it is an oasis of calm.”

Ahmed from has suffered racial abuse and violence in Aigburth and Lark Lane. “I don’t feel safe in Sefton Park. I walk around the Meadowlands often in the evenings and after dark - it is the only place I am safe. I need this land for therapeutic reasons”.

Paul from St. Michael’s was first drawn to the site because it was the first place with nesting Sparrowhawks. “It has a diverse wildlife, and protects the nature reserve area of Sefton Park. I have been regularly recording the diversity of wild life on the meadows for over 20 years”.

Conclusion

The council should avoid a long, costly and damaging campaign by withdrawing it’s plan to sell Sefton Park Meadows now. It should start to consult with local community groups around improvements that could be made to the park.

Martin Dobson

Save Sefton Park Meadows


The names have been changed for this document.