

Agenda Item 8

Report to: Planning Committee

Date of Meeting: 16 November 2011

Subject: Core Strategy for Sefton: interim report following consultation at the Options Stage

Report of: Director Built Environment

Wards Affected: All

Is this a Key Decision? No

Is it included in the Forward Plan?
No

Exempt/Confidential

No

Purpose/Summary

To provide Members with an initial summary of consultation received to the Options stage of the Core Strategy, the further work which is needed before a full Report of consultation can be published, and to indicate the next steps beyond that.

Recommendation

That Members note the initial results of consultation following the Options Stage of the Core Strategy and the proposed next steps.

How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Objectives?

	<u>Corporate Objective</u>	<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community		✓	
2	Jobs and Prosperity		✓	
3	Environmental Sustainability		✓	
4	Health and Well-Being		✓	
5	Children and Young People		✓	
6	Creating Safe Communities		✓	
7	Creating Inclusive Communities		✓	
8	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening Local Democracy		✓	

Agenda Item 8

Reasons for the Recommendation:

To keep Members up to date with initial results of consultation and the next steps.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

None arising directly from this report.

(B) Capital Costs

None

Implications:

The following implications of this proposal have been considered and where there are specific implications, these are set out below:

Legal None		
Human Resources None		
Equality		
1.	No Equality Implication	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.	Equality Implications identified and mitigated	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Equality Implication identified and risk remains	<input type="checkbox"/>

Impact on Service Delivery:

None

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

The Head of Corporate Finance (FD 1123/11) has no comments on this report as there are no direct financial implications as a result of it. The Head of Corporate Legal Services (LD 484/11) has been consulted and her comments have been incorporated into the report.

Are there any other options available for consideration?

No.

Implementation Date for the Decision

N/A

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Background Papers:

Individual representations and petitions received as part of the consultation on the Core Strategy Options Paper.

1. Background

- 1.1 Members considered an initial report on consultation on the Options Stage of the Core Strategy at their meeting on 21st September 2011. As a reminder, the 12 week consultation period for the Options Paper ran between 23rd May and 12th August.
- 1.2 The requirements for consultation for this kind of document are set out in Regulation 25 of the Town and Country Planning [Local Development] [England] [Amendment] Regulations 2004 [as amended]. This states that a Local Planning Authority must invite 'specific' and 'general' consultation bodies who may have an interest in their area to make representations about what the Core Strategy ought to contain.
- 1.3 During the consultation period the Core Strategy team attended 65 events (meetings, presentations and drop in events) attended by about 3,000 people. The Core Strategy team spoke to many of these either individually or in groups.
- 1.4 This report provides an overview of the results of the consultation and some commentary on the key themes which have emerged. It sets out what further work needs to be done in providing a detailed response to the comments which have been made, and notes the next stages. This report is simply to be noted: it does not contain any recommendations for decisions, but is an important step towards providing a detailed report on all the comments which have been received.
- 1.5 Around 2,400 individual representations have been received, together with 13 petitions. Some of the petitioners also made their own comments (e.g. through an on-line petition) so these have also been logged as individual representations.
- 1.6 Each person who submitted a representation made on average just under 10 separate points. While many people raised similar issues, it will still take a number of weeks to respond in detail to all the comments received. This detailed response will be the subject of a final report to this Committee at the start of 2012.

2. Changing context

- 2.1 The context for the preparation of development plans is changing. The Localism Bill is expected to be enacted later this year or early next year, and this will result in the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies.
- 2.2 The draft National Planning Policy Framework is also expected to be approved early next year. This document raised many concerns about how it would be interpreted and what implications it would have for development. It remains to be seen to what extent the document will change from the version which was subject to consultation.

3. Overview of comments

- 3.1 The Core Strategy Options Paper outlined a number of key challenges, for example:

Agenda Item 8

- ◇ Meeting needs for new homes and jobs
- ◇ Providing for an ageing population
- ◇ Meeting specialist housing needs
- ◇ Responding to the challenge of climate change
- ◇ Improving access to services and facilities
- ◇ Increasing enterprise and encouraging new businesses
- ◇ Improving health.

3.2 However, the vast majority of those commenting on the Options did not comment on these issues. Their key concern was the suggested location of sites for new homes. In particular, there was a large weight of objection to new homes being proposed on Green Belt sites and on urban green space.

3.3 There are a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, following early criticism that people generally were not aware of the consultation, the decision was taken to write to people within 50m of Green Belt sites which had been identified as being potentially suitable for development, and also to properties fronting green space sites. 8,000 letters were sent out. This meant that the Options Paper, draft Green Belt and green space studies were brought to the attention of people who would be most directly affected and therefore most likely to object.

3.4 Secondly, when local residents became aware that Green Belt sites in their area had been identified, the word soon spread to their neighbours and nearby residents. Some circulated leaflets and petitions. This in turn generated press coverage about Green Belt land being needed for new homes.

3.5 Some of this publicity implied that a decision was about to be made on the development of these sites. Many therefore turned up at drop-in events, often anxious or angry, with one thing in mind: “how can I object to the development of the site next to where I live?” At these events, people were handed a leaflet which summarised the Options Paper and also contained a response form. The response form referred to the Options Paper and provided links to both electronic and paper versions.

3.6 It was clear at the drop-in events that many people were not interested in the wider context of the Options Paper. This was also apparent through many of the responses we received. Some people did not take the opportunity to read the four-sided summary leaflet, other than finding out how to object to ‘their’ site. 15% of those who said they favoured Option Three (most development in the Green Belt) also said they objected to the development of Green Belt and / or green space sites! The leaflet clearly explained that Option Three would mean building 6,600 new homes in the Green Belt. The reason for this contradictory response is likely to be that Option Three is summarised as ‘a stable population’. This may have been misinterpreted as meaning ‘staying the way we are’.

3.7 People found it difficult to agree to the Government requirements for preparing the Core Strategy and also to key pieces of evidence which the Plan has to be based on:

Agenda Item 8

- why must Sefton plan so far ahead, particularly at a time of major economic uncertainty?
- how can the expected number of households continue to grow when the population is projected to continue to decline?
- how can there be a need for new homes when there are so many empty homes?

- 3.8 The Options Paper identifies a range of issues and challenges which it suggests that the Core Strategy needs to address. The issues and challenges highlight, amongst other things, that the Borough will need a certain number of homes over the plan period, and points towards Options Two or Three as more likely to satisfy these needs. The survey form asked whether people agree with the issues and challenges which are raised. It is perhaps not surprising that a large majority of those who favoured Option One also disagreed with the issues and objectives (71%). [This figure can only take account of the 21% of individual representations which completed the survey form – the rest were mainly individual letter, email, or comments within a petition].
- 3.9 Of the 2,400 individual representations received, about 70% could be mapped [most of the rest did not provide either a house number or postcode, and 19 were from outside the borough]. Of those which could be mapped, just over 50% were within 50m from a Green Belt or green space site identified as having potential for development, and over 81% were within 250m of a Green Belt and 100m of a green space site. This shows a close match between responses received and the location of sites identified as possibly suitable for development.
- 3.10 Of the 8,000 letters sent out to people within 50m of a site in the Green Belt, or fronting a green space in the urban area, individual responses were received from fewer than one in six. However, it is likely that many people who were directly notified may have signed one of the petitions. Many may also have responded individually and signed a petition.
- 3.11 As mentioned above [para 1.4], those submitting representations made on average just under 10 comments each. The concerns raised about sites in the Green Belt varied from one part of the Borough to another. The three main concerns raised by people for each site, or group of sites, identified in the Green Belt, are listed in **Annex A**, together with plans showing the location of the sites. A similar approach is used to record comments and location of those green space sites which were the subject of many representations.

4. Petitions

- 4.1 13 petitions were received, with just under 7,800 signatures. The details of these are contained in **Annex B**, with plans showing the area to which the petition relates or the area where most of the petitioners reside.
- 4.2 Nine of the petitions relate to a site, or number of sites, identified in the Green Belt. Five relate to specific areas, the source or subject of which is listed below:
- ◇ Churchtown Residents Campaign Group
 - ◇ Opposing building of 157 houses at rear of Bracken Way, Formby
 - ◇ For the preservation of Lydiate Farmland

Agenda Item 8

- ◇ For the preservation of Little Crosby/Thornton Farmland; and
- ◇ A comments book to allow residents of Aintree to have their say on how the Core Strategy would affect their village

Four petitions oppose the development of Green Belt land in general.

4.3 Four further petitions object to the loss of specific green space sites:

- ◇ Kerslake Way, Hightown
- ◇ Somerville Road (adjacent to Victoria Park), Waterloo
- ◇ Maguire Ave (former Bootle Stadium site)
- ◇ Former St Raymond's school, Netherton.

5. Overview of results of consultation

5.1 The following paragraphs summarise the early findings from the response to the Core Strategy Options.

Individual responses

5.2 Of the individual responses received, approximately 95% raise concerns about development of sites in the Green Belt or on green spaces.

The main reasons given for this are:

- ◇ Wish to protect the Green Belt/ prevent urban sprawl **65%**
- ◇ Concern over traffic issues **55%**
- ◇ Impact on or lack of services/ facilities **40%**
- ◇ Need to protect agricultural land/ concern over 'food security' **31%**
- ◇ Desire to protect nature/ habitats **30%**
- ◇ Green Belt land is used for recreation/ tourism **25%**
- ◇ There are enough brownfield sites to meet need **23%**
- ◇ Don't need new homes as there are too many vacant homes **22%**
- ◇ Area prone to flooding **19%**

[These figures do not add up to 100% as people were able to make multiple comments].

However this is not the same as saying that people were against development on all Green Belt sites or on all green spaces. A number of people also suggested that other sites in the Green Belt might be suitable for development e.g. at Ashworth Hospital or the nearby site at Ashworth which, until recently, was being developed for a prison.

Focus groups

5.3 Members agreed at their meeting in June 2011 that focus groups would be likely to offer a way of obtaining views from a wider cross-section of the Borough. The focus groups were held in each Area Committee area, and were organised and

Agenda Item 8

hosted by Mott McDonald. A number of themes emerge similar to those in the main public consultation e.g. :

- scepticism about need for more homes when the population is declining
- general distrust about estimated need for new homes
- need to use empty homes and clean up brownfield land first
- general concern that Green Belt/ green spaces should be protected.

- 5.4 The focus groups offered a way of trying to obtain a more representative opinion from each of community areas across the borough. Members of the focus groups generally did not support either development in the Green Belt or on green space. In one key aspect, their views echo that emerging from the rest of the consultation - the Focus Group Report notes that "those less likely to be directly affected by the plans, that is not in the zones that could potentially be built upon, were more inclined to be accepting of green belt land being used" [p.41].
- 5.5 This emphasises the challenge of trying to get representative views which reflect the wider issues which the Core Strategy must tackle (e.g. the need to provide affordable homes), and not just based on personal interests. This reflects the wider problem of consultations of this nature where those most affected comment whilst those less affected tend not to do so.

Responses from organisations and other interests

- 5.6 There was often a different response to the Options Paper from organisations and others who represented wider interests. This is still at an early stage of analysis, but some initial observations can be made.
- 5.7 Local authorities and other organisations: either Options Two or Three (which involve varying degrees of building in the Green Belt) were supported by a variety of different organisations and individuals. These include the adjoining local authorities of West Lancashire, Knowsley and Liverpool (the latter gave qualified support to Option Two), the National Trust, Home Builders' Federation, One Vision Housing, Formby Civic Trust and the Southport Partnership (with the exception of the political membership of the Partnership).
- 5.8 Business community: in an electronic survey participated in by 20 members of the Sefton Economic Forum, 81% felt that Options Two or Three best met Sefton's economic needs.
- 5.9 Developers and landowners also supported either Option Two or Three, often identifying land which they wished to see developed.
- 5.10 There was some support for an approach between Option One and Option Two – i.e. an acceptance of some development in the Green Belt, but not as much as was implied by either of these Options.

Agenda Item 8

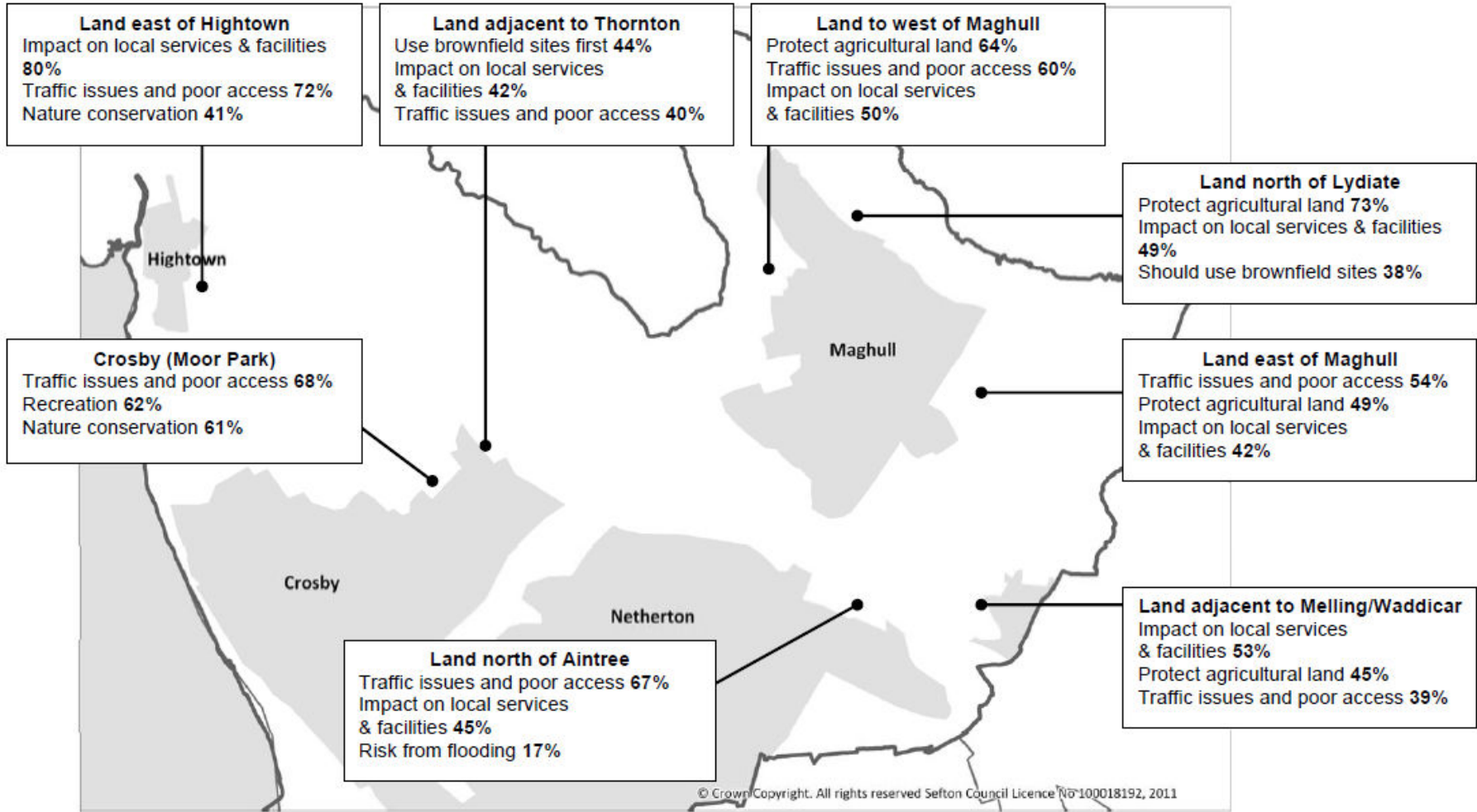
6. Representations on the draft Green Belt and green space studies

- 6.1 The survey form asked for people's views on both the draft Green Belt and green space studies. It is clear from the representations that there was confusion between the studies, and what is green belt and what is green space, and both may have been thought to relate to any 'green' site on which there was the possibility of development. In any case, if people objected to either a Green Belt site OR a green space site, on almost every occasion they also objected to the approach taken to both the draft Green Belt study and the draft green space study.
- 6.2 Generally it seems to be the case that where people had read the two studies, they supported the overall approach taken even if they disagreed with the conclusions in relation to specific sites.

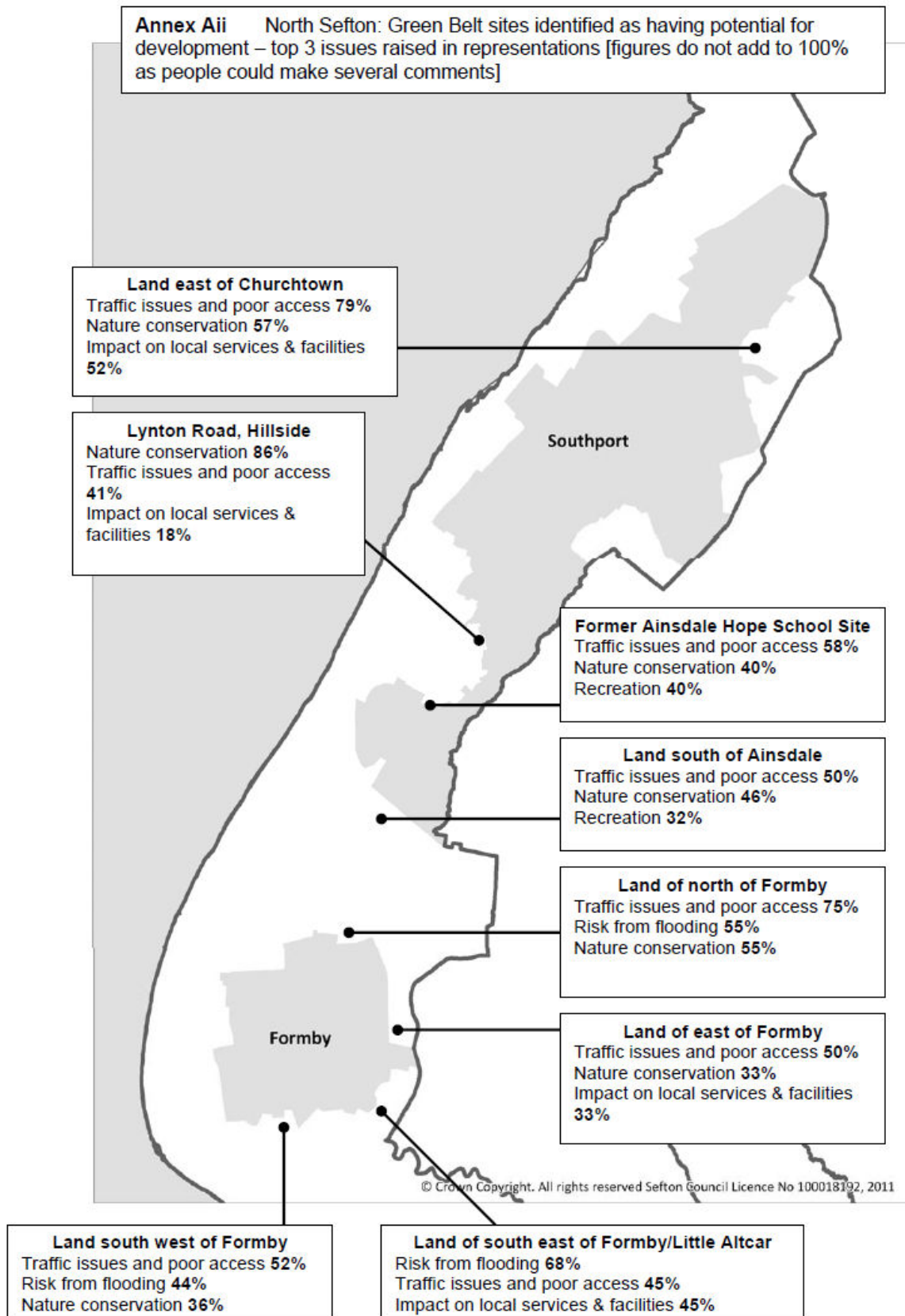
7. What next?

- 7.1 A detailed response is being prepared to all the comments which have been submitted. This is a large task given the total number of individual comments – as previously indicated, the 2,400 representations contained on average just under 10 comments each.
- 7.2 Many of the comments raise issues which need to be considered in detail before a response can be given. For example, quite a number of comments relate to flood risk and these need to be discussed both internally within the Council and with the Environment Agency.
- 7.3 Discussions have also begun with DEFRA and Natural England to follow up concerns raised about the possibility of losing high quality agricultural land.
- 7.4 The outcome of these discussions and a response to all the comments made in the representations will be reported fully to Planning Committee and Cabinet early in 2012.
- 7.5 These responses will be incorporated into a Report of Consultation, and all those who made representations will be notified when this has been prepared.
- 7.6 A Member/ Officer steering group will be established to guide the next steps of the process. Planning Committee, Cabinet and Council will then agree what the Preferred Option should be.
- 7.7 The Preferred Option will be the subject of a further 12 week consultation later in 2012.

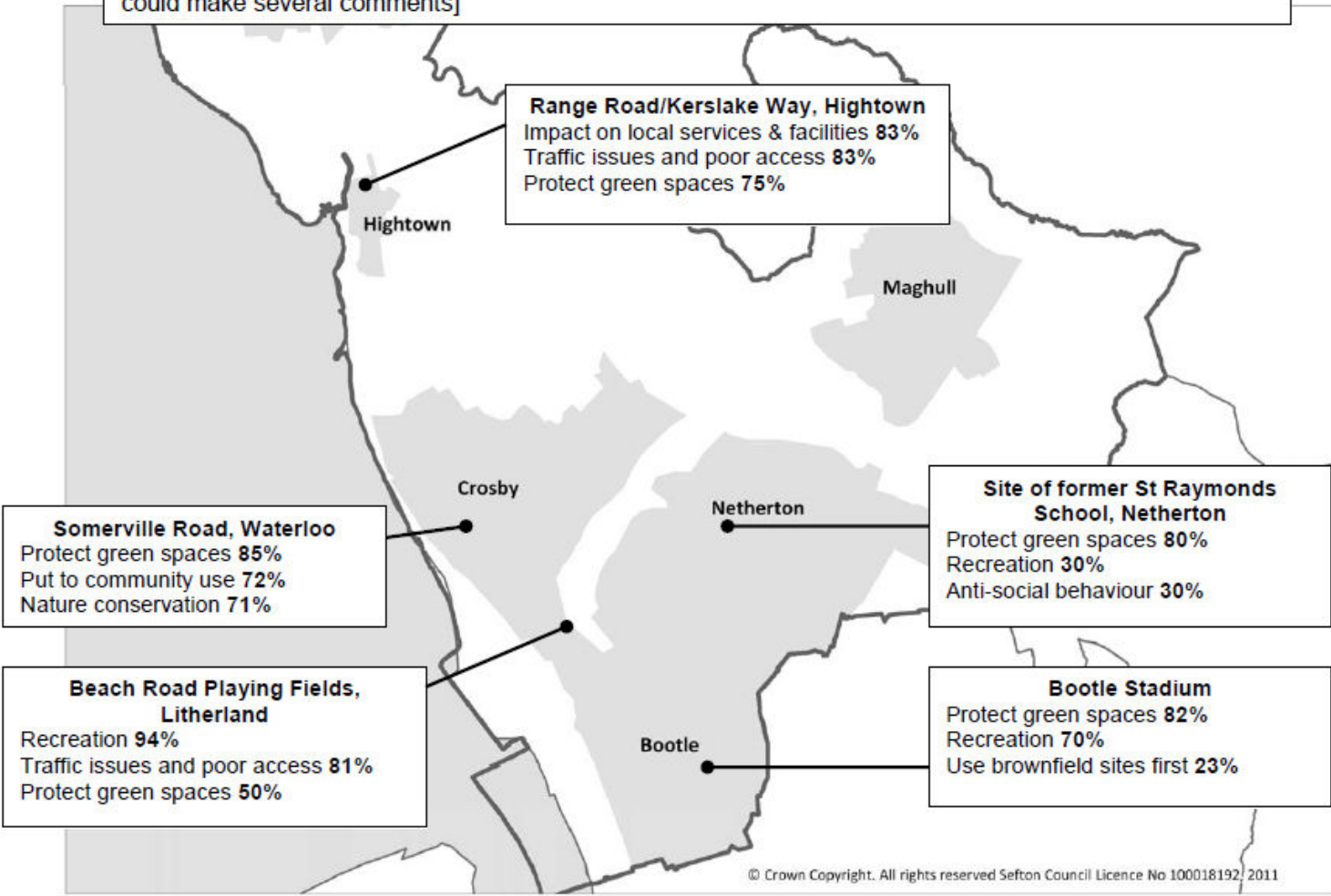
Annex Ai South and central Sefton: Green Belt sites identified as having potential for development – top 3 issues raised in representations [figures do not add to 100% as people could make several comments]



Agenda Item 8



Annex Aiii Green space sites identified as having potential for development and which attracted 10 or more representations – top 3 issues raised in representations [figures do not add to 100% as people could make several comments]



ANNEX B

List of petitions and other collated responses received during Core Strategy Options Consultation

Petition/Response	Submitted by	Number of Signatures	<u>Notes</u>
Petition opposing building of 157 houses at rear of Bracken Way, Formby	Mr PG Wiencke	92	
Petition from Churchtown Residents Campaign Group	Martyn Sayer	652	
Preservation of Lydiate Farmland	Eric Haworth	388	
Petition for the Preservation of Little Crosby/Thornton Farmland	Bill Esterson MP Cllr Steve McGinnity	1922	
Petition against any grade 1 or 2 agricultural land being removed from Green Belt in Sefton	Maghull, Lydiate & Molyneux Branch Liberal Democrats	428	
Petition to object to building on Green Belt in Sefton area and to support Option One (Urban Containment) for the Core Strategy	Elizabeth Thompson	422	Online petition. Many people submitted individual comments which have been also treated as individual submissions.
Comments book to allow residents of Aintree to have their say on how the Core Strategy would affect their village		223	Comments book placed in Aintree library. Many people submitted individual comments which have been also treated as individual submissions.
Petition in support of Option One (Urban Containment) for the Core Strategy		394	
Petition against the lifting of Urban Green Space	Keith Grant	576	

Status on land adjacent to the Altcar Rifle Range Access Road, which backs onto Mark Road and Hester Close	Bob Daniels Debbie Roberts		
Petition against development in the Green Belt	Colin Reader	1367	
Petition to oppose any redevelopment of the Green Space at the former Bootle Stadium Site, Maguire Avenue for future housing or industrial use		691	
Petition to oppose the change of use of the area West of Somerville Road (adj Victoria Park) from green space to housing land.	Stan Hesketh	483	Residents would wish this site to be incorporated into Victoria Park for use as a Waterloo Community Garden.
Petition to oppose allotments on site of former St Raymonds School	S Flynn	138	
		7776	

Agenda Item 8

