

SCLP Tactical group – Southport Seafront – Coastal Gateway

25th April 2024 – updates in red

Purpose of Briefing Paper

This paper updates SCLP Tactical Group on the suite of projects at Southport Seafront and wider context in the development of the area.

Introduction/Background

The Sefton Coast Plan, adopted in September 2017, see here item 11: [Sefton Home](#), recognises the need to create high quality visitor infrastructure at a number of access points, known as coastal gateways, along Sefton's Coast. The purpose is to drive growth within the visitor economy to the benefit of local businesses, provide a high-quality visitor experience at these access points, and reduce visitor pressure on areas of high conservation value and on local residents. Southport Seafront has been recognised as one of these coastal gateways.

The area is formally protected as internationally important dune habitat, supporting many rare and important species of flora and fauna, as well as providing a natural sea defence. The intertidal areas support internationally important populations of overwintering birds, and the coast is important for passage migrant birds, for breeding populations of European Protected Species such as Natterjack Toad and Sand Lizard, for locally rare insects and other invertebrates and is a hotspot for biodiversity. The Coast is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar site and Local Nature Reserve. Important for recreation, the area includes, a "good" bathing water quality, lifeguarded beach, links to the England Coast Path and national cycling routes and is one of the key bases for Green Sefton. It also contains several other buildings that are owned by Sefton Council, including Toad Hall, and the former Sands public house.

Consultation on the future development of Southport Seafront Gateway was first proposed to take place during the Summer season of 2021. Due to Covid this consultation did not take place. Subsequently, the main consultation relating to this project has taken place as part of the Southport Town Deal bid (Summer 2020). This resulted in a suite of major investment and regeneration projects being prioritised and overseen by the Town Deal Board, overseeing the investment of a successful £37.5M central government grant.

Meanwhile, several operational changes to the way visitors are welcomed to the coast were introduced in the summers of 2020, 2021 and 2022 with the 'Visitor Action Plan'. These included the increasing of staffing, including into the evening when the car park was then closed, the engagement of volunteers as 'ambassadors', and the introduction of skips/ euro bins and other waste management measures. The existing toilets at Ocean Plaza were closed during the Covid pandemic, with temporary portaloos provided during this period.

The following sections provides an update on the main elements of the development in the area.

Projects updates

Officers attending an internal workshop in May 2023 which highlighted major considerations, issues and projects in development in the area, headlines of ongoing projects in the area include:

- Overview of Coast, Coast Plan, Southport Beach/ coastal area extracts from introduction by Mark Shaw:
 - *Council wide 2030 consultation – big support for coast as reason people choose to live, work and visit the borough – led to ‘year of the coast’ 2017, and launch of:*
 - *Coast Plan, launched in 2017, requires sub strategies in development, and acknowledges the tension between internationally significant nature conservation, tourism and economy – gateway masterplans proposed for Crosby, Formby, Ainsdale and Southport*
 - *Delivery of this, delegated to Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership (SCLP) to deliver – long standing partnership (40yrs+) of other land owning partners, statutory and government agencies etc*
 - *Southport beach/ coastal gateway:*
 - *Coast is accreting, beach is rising, and salt marsh expanding – mixed views in the community – some see benefits for climate change/ flood mitigation, others see it as a loss of tourism and the ‘golden sands’ of old – but happened for hundreds of years, and will affect fundamentally peoples access and impression of the coast here in the future (likely to result in beach parking no longer possible in time, and affect things like air show (Natural England already flagging concerns)*
 - *Need to consider the area as a whole – dunescape connects Southport and Ainsdale, as does the coast road - thinking longer term, and bearing in mins Southport Town Centre will remain the main focus for tourism, but the main beach offer may evolve to be Ainsdale, we could consider how to sustainably get people from Southport to Ainsdale and vice versa...*

Other updates discussed at the workshop, and to follow in writing from colleagues on the following:

- Southport Town Deal Programme overview
- Marine Lake Events Centre (MLEC), which received Planning Permission in April 2023, with contractor already appointed, demolition **is commencing currently**, followed by construction for two years and

opening in 2026, this is the single largest investment project in Seftons history

- WSP Seafront and Town Deal
- Atkinson/WSP Parking and Wayfinding
- Cove/Princes park (inland surf pool)
- Splash World
- Wind Turbine at Eco Centre
- Townscape Heritage works
- Lord Street Lettings Over The Shops (LOTS)
- Southport Golf Course and White House

The way forwards

Officers discussed the need to prioritise the development of a masterplan/ strategy for the area – this would set projects in context, and ensure all align

The development of a masterplan for the area would need resourcing appropriately – it will require not only a lead ‘client’ service area, with a senior Project Sponsor in place, but no Council service currently has capacity (nor to some extent capability in all aspects) to lead this – it would require an external consultants support and for this to be funded accordingly also.

This remains an officer only and initial discussion, which will be discussed and developed with Members in due course, and a further update report can be presented to the next Tactical meeting at that time.

An ongoing discussion amongst officers key to the Southport gateway is the future repair of the Pier (which remains closed currently) – surveys are being undertaken and so the scale and scope of the future improvement works will be understood, to inform future funding bids etc

Meanwhile, operationally, the beach parking remains a challenge due to tides, watching days, air show etc and general ground conditions it remains opened only on very few days to date, and anticipated for the 2024 season

Prepared by Mark Shaw, 25.4.24